

**THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL  
ELITE JORDANIAN WOMEN'S GENDERED  
IDENTITY AS HONOURABLE WOMEN**

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## ABSTRACT

This is an explorative study about single and married professional elite Jordanian women's (PEJW's) lives during the first two years of the reign of King Abdullah II (1999-2001). Professional elite women are a recent addition to the paid labour force. PEJW are situated precariously within three contradictory discourses: liberal-secular, conservative and Islamist. Each discourse wants to assert its notion of modernity, its brand of socio-politico-economic development, and its ideals of social morality. These discourses place differing demands on PEJW. Furthermore, each discourse manipulates the concepts of Islam, Arab nationalism, Arab-Islamic identity, cultural authenticity, family honour, and women's position in society as they vie for superiority. This study examines the delicate balance single and married women have to maintain as they act on their own self-interests while navigating between their home and work life. The study underscores the point that women remain mindful of their connective status in relation to their family, and that, by virtue of their gender, they personify honour. Drawing on theoretical approaches that attempt to resolve the agency-structure debate, this study examines women's agentic action as they stretch the boundaries of local notions of honour in order to maintain an honourable positioning within society. This means PEJW shape and are shaped by the discourse of honour, and in the process they define for themselves what it means to be honourable modern professional Jordanian women. The study concludes that when examining the agentic action of Jordanian women, agency should not be based on the liberal concept of the autonomous individual, but rather on an alternative model of individualism that considers women's connectivity with their kinship group.



DECLARATION:

The research contained within this thesis is my own work.

Leah Sawalha-Freij

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have adopted a simplified version of the system recommended by the International Journal of Middle East Studies. I have avoided diacriticals in my transliteration with the exception of ‘ayn (‘), and the hamza (’). I assume that specialists who know the language will be able to recognize the words, while non-specialists would find diacriticals confusing. I have used common English spellings for proper names of well-known figures and places. I have also tried to represent the colloquial pronunciation of terms as accurately as possible.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A.U.B: American University of Beirut

A.U.C: American University of Cairo

AHDR: Arab Human Development Report

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

CF: Complementarity feminism

CIF: Complementarity Islamist feminism

CMF: Complementarity Muslim feminism

CSF: Complementarity Secular feminism

ECC: Economic Consultative Committee

ESCWA: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

GPD: Gender-power-dynamics.

IAF: Islamic Action front

IR: International Relations

JD: Jordanian dinar

JNCW: Jordanian National Committee for Women

JT: Jordan Times

JWU: Jordanian Women's Union

M.E: Middle East

MB: Muslim Brotherhood

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

MOE: Ministry of Education

MOH: Ministry of Health

MOP: Ministry of Planning

MP: Member of Parliament

MPEJW: Married professional elite Jordanian women

NGOs: Non-government organizations

PEJ: Professional elite Jordanian

PEJW: Professional elite Jordanian women

RNGOs: Royal non-government organizations

SPEJW: Single professional elite Jordanian women

TW: Third World

TWw: Third World women

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNIFEM: United Nations Development Fund for Women

## GLOSSARY

*'Aib*: something that is shameful or disgraceful, and includes a wide range of behaviour that is considered to be improper (Stewart 1994).

*'Ammo*: uncle, usually father's brother.

*'Awra*: is imbued with layered meanings linking women with sexuality, shame and defectiveness. According to Al-Mawrid English-Arabic/Arabic-English Dictionary, *'awra* has two meanings. First, it refers to one's private parts, the genitals. The second meaning is being defective. When a woman is referred to as *'awra*, the implication is that she is defective, has a blemish and her shortcoming is related to her sexuality.

*'Aza*: condolence calls

*'Eid*: participants used this word to denote a religious holiday. Generally, it means a holiday

*'Ird*: family honour

*'Isma*: a stipulation written in a marriage contract that allows a woman to divorce herself from her husband.

*Allah*: God

*Al-Walidein*: parents

*Amir*: prince

*At-ta'a al-mutlaqa*: total obedience

*Bayt al-ta'a*: or house of obedience, a law that was practiced in Jordan from 1951 to 1976. The law gave the husband the right to force his run away wife to return to him even if it is against her will. *Bayt al-ta'a* is not based on the shari'a, rather its genesis emanates from Ottoman Law. According to the Family Law of 1951, law No. 92, article 35, a husband must treat his wife properly, and in return she must obey him (as long as it does not contravene Islam). According to Naqshabandi (1995, 202-204), for a wife to obey her husband three conditions must be met: (1) he must provide for her; (2) he has to abide by his agreement in the marriage contract and provide her with the jewellery, furniture and valuables as agreed upon, and (3) he provides her with a house. If these conditions are met, and she walks out of the home, a husband can have his wife forcibly returned to her marriage home by the local police. According to article 33, a wife is expected to follow her husband and relocate in accordance to his wish as long as there is no intention on his part to injure or harm her.

*Daftar al-'ai'la*: family book. It is a legal document that delineates the head of household, the father, and the details of his four possible legal wives and offspring. His children remain registered in the family book until they marry. Upon marriage, a son establishes his own family book whereas a daughter is added on to her husband's. Single daughters regardless of their age remain in their father's family book and household. When the daughter loses both parents, her name is registered in her brother's family book under "other information" as if an appendage. Only widows are eligible to be 'head of household,' and have their own family book. Divorced women in 1998 were granted this privilege; however, their children are still listed in their father's family book (Sawalha 1999).

*Diwan*: a semi public meeting place, usually it is a male space, in one's home or designated area where family matters are discussed among male members of the extended family/clan. It is also used as a meeting place to hold condolence calls known as 'aza.

*Fitna*: social chaos. It can be thought of as sexual anarchy.

*Hadith*: short narratives about the Prophet and his companions and contemporaries, authenticated by a chain of narrators stretching back to the Prophet or his companions.

*Haram*: unlawful.

*Ijtihad*: is the individual intellectual effort of understanding Islam (the Qur'an and *hadith*, traditional values, and the examination of Islamic history). It is the process and act of interpretation. For detailed explanation, see Noaks (1995).

*Ikhwan*: brotherhood. It usually refers to the Muslim brotherhood.

*Inshalla*: God willing

*Jaha*: (according to expert informants) refers to a group of male tribal dignitaries, usual the notable elders of families, who represent a person, or family/tribe in cases of asking for a girl's hand in marriage, seeking redress and/or interceding on someone's behalf in cases of accidents. This group is held in high esteem in the eyes of the community.

*Kalam in-nas*: people's talk or gossip

*Katb al-kitab*: signing of the marriage contract

*Khulwa*: a woman's right to divorce her husband. It is also spelled by JNCW's document as *khoulweh*.

*Mabruk*: congratulations

*Maghrib*: west

*Mahr*: dowry. Prompt dowry is the dowry paid to the bride at the time of marriage, and deferred is paid to the wife when her husband divorces her at a later time

*Mashriq*: east

*Mu'aqqada*: implies that a woman is uptight, tense, full of insecurities, suspecting of peoples' motives, and is suspicious. Moreover, she has issues of jealousy of other women, is bitter, spiteful and sexually frustrated. The transliteral meaning in English is complex; yet, the essence of the meaning implies the notion of neurosis. The outcome of these labels is that the women feel they are *lacking*, incompetent with inherent deficiency.

*Muhajjaba*: a woman who wears a *hijab* (scarf that covers a woman's head).

*Mut'a*: pleasure

*Nafaqa*: a husband's financial responsibility towards his wife. This includes her daily allowance, also referred to as maintenance or in the case of divorce her alimony also referred to as maintenance.

*Naqisa*: incomplete

*Nashez*: disobedient

*Naw' al-ijtima'i*: Notion of gender. This is a western concept that has been translated into Arabic by the phrase of *naw' al-ijtima'i*. Literal translation is 'social type'.

*Nushuz*: disobedience

*Qawiyya*: originates from the root word meaning strong. When applied to women it acquires a negative connotation: a derogatory term implying being overly strong, and excessive assertiveness, a transgression of the boundaries of modesty and femininity.

*Qiwama*: The exact meaning of this word is contested. It has been explained as men's authority over women, men as protectors, and/or maintainers of women.

*Rida al-walidein*: pleasing one's parents

*Sadiq*: boyfriend

*Sahib*: friend or companion

*Shabab*: male youths

*Sharaf*: honour

*Shari'a*: Muslim religious law

*Sharqi*: eastern



*Shilla*: group of friends, usually a mixed group, and is considered to be an important structure in the lives of Jordanian women. It is their major source of support, and protects them from society's negative attributes.

*Shura*: consultation

*Sulha*: act of reconciliation, peace making, literally to bring about a cease-fire in times of tribal feuds.

*Sura*: Qur'anic verse

*Ta'a*: obedience

*Takhrib*: destruction

*Tarhib*: welcoming

*Turath*: Arab cultural heritage

*Ulama*: religious scholars

*Wasta*: is a "complex patronage system" with a built-in mediating mechanism where the patron intercedes on behalf of his/her client (Sharabi, 1988, 46).

*Ya'ni*: literally "I mean to say."

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# INTRODUCTION

After living on my own in the United States (US) for 15 years, I returned to Amman, Jordan, in 1992 as a single professional elite Jordanian woman. It was hard adjusting to my new life. Initially I attributed my difficulties to cultural shock, readjusting to living with my parents as a single adult daughter and working in a developing country. Time passed, but my struggles did not diminish. After seven years, I continued to feel misplaced and wondered if other professional elite Jordanian women (PEJW) shared similar experiences to mine. By professional elite, I mean the privileged women, mainly from upper-middle to upper class given the opportunity to pursue their Bachelors and further degrees, and occupying senior posts in the civil service, non-government organisations (NGOs) or the private sphere. They could be managers, experts in their field or entrepreneurs.

Over two years I approached several PEJW, hoping to hear their accounts. What were their experiences as professional women both at home and at work? Most of them were reluctant to share their stories with me. The few who were willing felt overburdened by family, social obligations and professional duties. Married women said that they had to meet these obligations for fear of dishonouring their family. Single women added that they felt trapped and constrained, because their families expected them to be home by evening; also frustrated because their parents worried about what people would say if they came home after dark. Both single and married women made it clear that they guarded their reputation. They could not afford it being sullied since their personal reputation had a direct bearing on their families' honourable social status in society. I turned to the academic literature for answers. There were some studies on



Jordanian working women. The majority were on working women from poor urban and rural communities. There were two studies on professional Jordanian women, but none on PEJW. Studies on western professional women did not resonate with my experience on several counts. Firstly, notions of personhood are mapped out differently. Western societies stress individualism and place emphasis on independence and autonomy. The Arab world places emphasis on an individual's membership of their family, stressing family bonds and reminding of their connection to their natal and extended family (Joseph 1999a). Secondly, the discourse of honour remains strong in the Arab and Muslim world, shaping everyday social organisation, placing women in a precarious situation as the repository of the family's honour (Joseph and Slyomovics 2001). To safeguard their family's honour, family members are instructed to supervise their female kin's behaviour, and brothers are entrusted with the main responsibility (Joseph 1994). Thirdly, most of the Arab countries are neo-colonial states.<sup>1</sup> Since independence each state was and is engaged in state building projects while being subjected to diverse forces, mainly the rise in Islamism and the pull towards globalisation (Dawisha 2000; UNDP 2002). The issue of women, their position in society, and what they symbolise becomes entangled with the country's national identity, honour (Pourzand 1999) and development (Hijab 2001), debates concerning the authenticity of Arab-cultural heritage (Elsadda 2001), Arab-Islamic identity (Seikaly 1998), and "integrity" of Islam (Peteet 1993, 53). Scholars on Arab Middle Eastern women agree that women's sense of entitlement has expanded because of their access to education and employment. Yet the extent to which women can enact it is debatable.

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<sup>1</sup> I choose to use the term neo-colonial rather than post-colonial since I share the view of some feminists (Afshar 1996a, 1996b; Afshar and Dennis 1992) who argue that Third World (TW) countries are still colonies, they are now colonies of nations who control the global economies.

The significance of this study is the exploration of PEJW's agentic action, the extent they can act in their own self-interest, given that women seldom make life choices independent of their social bonds and obligations (Joseph 1999a). This is an explorative study about the lives of PEJW, and was conducted shortly after the death of King Hussein, between the first and second year of King Abdullah's reign, 1999-2000. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups I describe women's own accounts of managing the conventions of being an honourable woman at work and home. For my analysis, I draw on theoretical approaches that attempt to resolve the agency-structure debate, and on Third World (TW) feminism.<sup>2</sup> This research attempts to answer the following question: "What are single and married PEJW's own accounts of managing the conventions of being an honourable woman as they navigate between their work and home environments?"

I argue that PEJW's honourable positioning guides them to act in such a manner as to maintain their good reputation. I will emphasise that women's position as honourable is relational. Their womanhood depends on with whom they are interacting and when, and their identity as honourable women is always under construction. I will illustrate that both single and married PEJW women shape and are shaped by the moral discourse of the honourable woman as they navigate between home and work. They manipulate the local notions of honour, and act strategically to maintain their honourable positioning. In the process they define for themselves the meaning of being modern honourable Jordanian professional women.

Chapter one describes the setting of the study. It examines the recent changes the country is undergoing, and contextualises the lives of PEJW, who are situated in the midst of several discourses with competing agendas. The local socio-cultural practices and beliefs are discussed

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<sup>2</sup> Also referred to in the literature as post-colonial feminism.

and the chapter concludes with the review of the literature on Jordanian women and work. Chapter two is on methodology. Chapters three and four examine respectively single and married PEJW's agentic action as they manoeuvre between their professional and personal life. I will attempt to illustrate their struggles as they try to reach a balance between social identity, defined by what society deems to be an honourable woman, and their own sense of themselves, defined by themselves. The determinant of the length of chapters three and four relates to the need to show the interconnectedness of PEJW's personal and professional lives. Chapter five develops typologies of professional Jordanian women, their brands of feminism, and shows how women are complicit in perpetuating the mythical image of the honourable woman, by examining their views about the first elected female MP Toujan Faisal. My conclusion, chapter six, is that when examining PEJW's agencies, connectivity to family, natal and extended, remains a powerful influence that deserves further study at discrete intervals.

# CHAPTER ONE

## SETTING THE SCENE

In this chapter I will contextualise the lives of PEJW. I highlight the three interlocking discourses they are situated in, the political, moral and academic. The discourses are about the future of Jordan's socio-politico-economic development and women's position in society. By discourse, I mean the system of knowledge about a theme in a society that defines the way power relations are created. This system includes the verbal and non-verbal text of a given debate within a particular context. Each discourse has its own specific jargon, which is reflective of its underlying ideology.<sup>3</sup> I also examine a number of socio-cultural practices and beliefs affecting PEJW's lives and decision-making, such as the local understanding of certain Islamic principles, family bonds, notions of honour, gossip and reputation and the practice of *wasta* (a complex patronage system with a built-in mediating mechanism where the patron intercedes on behalf of her/his client).<sup>4</sup> Against this backdrop, I provide an overview of the literature on Jordanian women and work, stressing society's attitude towards women joining the paid labour force.

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<sup>3</sup> For a critique on the term discourse see Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990). Also see Foucault (1981).

<sup>4</sup> I will discuss this in detail elsewhere in this chapter.

## JORDAN UNDER A NEW LEADERSHIP

### ERA OF ECONOMIC LIBERALISATION

In February 1999, King Abdullah II, inherited the throne after the death of King Hussein from cancer. In his bid to catapult Jordan into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and improve the country's socio-politico-economic development, Abdullah is trying to instil a new ideology; to replace first, the existing culture of loyalty to the extended family, and second, the dependency nurtured by the politics of rentierism,<sup>5</sup> where individuals are accustomed to handouts developing an attitude of acquiescence (Moore 2001). The move to modernise the economy from a statist to a liberal economy proves to be challenging given the entrenched bureaucracy and the stronghold of the old guard that is unwilling to relinquish power and acquired perks. This is a country where downward spiralling of the economy continues due to the region's political-economic instability (UNDP 2002). To ensure the fruition of the new plan for the country's development, a new momentum was and is still needed.

#### *Birth of a New Ideology*

The campaign "Jordan Small Country Big Ideas" is part of the national campaign *'ala qadir ahl al 'azim ta'ti al-'aza'im*, a verse of Arabic poetry by Al-Mutanabbi, which essentially means, "You reap from the determination you sow."<sup>6</sup> The slogan is meant to remind people both locally

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<sup>5</sup> Rentierism is the state's dependence on remittances, foreign aid, and grants. For debates on Jordan as a rentier state see Bint Talal (2001); Boulby (1999); Brand (1994); Brynen (1992); Moore (2001); Richards and Waterbury (1996); Wilson (1987). Regarding the history of Jordan see Abu-Odeh (1999); Rogan (1999); Salibi (1998), Wilson (1987). See also Al-Abbadi (1982); bin Muhammad (1999); Braizat (1995); Brand (1999); Freij and Robinson (1996); Jurenidini and McLaurin (1984); Layne (1994); Moaddel (2002); Mufti (1999); Shryock (1997 b).

<sup>6</sup> Other interpretations are: "to the extent you work hard, you will be rewarded" or "the more you give the more benefits you will reap."

and internationally that Jordan has big ideas and big talents despite its small size and its young and small population. On the home front, the intention is to boost citizens' pride and confidence in their citizenship and state. The slogan hopes to perpetuate a strong national will, a commitment to improve the country's development, and a unified vision to ensure the prosperity of Jordan to enable it to participate and compete in the world economy as well as engage individuals in creating their own economic opportunities (Awadallah 2001).

The drive was launched in 2000 as part of King Abdullah's integrated vision for the country's development involving political liberalization, and reforms in the country's economy, education, institutions/bureaucracy, judiciary/legislative and technology. The king's message emphasized the notion of meritocracy with the hope of gradually effacing the practice of *wasta*. By stressing the notion of "to the extent you apply yourself, you will produce", the king is hoping to bring about a shift in social attitudes towards work, and to create economic opportunities for young Jordanians, who constitute 73% of the population (MOP and UNDP 2000).<sup>7</sup>

Setting the study in Amman necessitates a description of the city. Amman is the capital of Jordan, home to half the population, with over 2 million inhabitants. To outsiders, Amman appears a western Americanised city, especially western Amman, referred to by Ammanites as the Beverly Hills of Amman. Western Amman is a haven for young adults who spend hours in the cafes smoking the water-pipe, socialising with mixed groups of friends: one may sometimes see young veiled women in the crowds.<sup>8</sup> The Jordanian young even dance in nightclubs. Occasionally are seen Jordanians who are critical of the uneven development in the city. They

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Jordan Human Development Report (MOP and UNDP 2000), 73% of the Jordanian population is under 29 years of age, with the 15-29 year olds accounting for 34.4%. The report is concerned about the country's brain drain due to the emigration of its youth in search of jobs.

<sup>8</sup> Young veiled women occasionally frequent the cafes but not to the same extent they frequent neighbourhoods in eastern Amman.

claim that western Amman is one world, and the rest of Amman with its squatter and poor neighbourhoods is another world. Despite its modern appearance, social relations and social classes are based primarily on kinship systems and secondarily on friendship ties, both of which curtail individuals' actions, especially women's.

## COMPETING DISCOURSES

The socio-politico-economic liberalisation intensified two existing debates: the political discourse, which deals with the political economic development of the country, and the moral discourse. The latter focuses on the social changes resulting from the socio-politico-economic economic liberalization, and how the changes are impacting on the moral fabric of society. Because of lack of current academic research on these debates in Jordan I rely heavily on Freij and Sawalha's (2001) study.<sup>9</sup>

### POLITICAL DISCOURSE

The political discourse encompasses three strands: liberal-secular, conservative and Islamist. The liberal-secular discourse is about catching up with modern technology and modernising the state. Liberal-secularists refer to themselves as modern, and use the terms tribal and backward to describe social practices that do not meet their standards. They favour applying state laws and abandoning alternative local practices for resolving legal disputes, and the use of *wasta*. Freij and Sawalha (2001) found that liberal-secularists desire to have international human rights as the basis of Jordanian state laws. Liberal-secularists advocate the separation of religion and state. They want the state, and not the extended family, to be the arbitrator and protector of individuals' choices.

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<sup>9</sup> See Karam (1998) who touches on these debates in Egypt, and Makdisi (1996) in Lebanon.

The conservative discourses outline their dissatisfaction with the dismantling of local practices such as *wasta*. Conservatives stress the importance of maintaining tribal practices and tribal law and refer to Jordan as either a tribal society (*mujtama' qabali* or *'asha'iri*) or an Arab-Islamic tribal society with a tribal Islamic culture (*thaqafa islamiyya qabaliyya*).<sup>10</sup> Conservatives fear “westoxification”, a term coined by Al-Ahmad (1982; quoted in Afshar 1999, xiii), “being saturated by western views.” Conservatives conflate religion with tradition, and want state laws to be based on *shari'a* and local tribal practices. They call for an alternative modernity rooted in tribal Arab Islamic principles. They are critical of the term modernisation, and claim it to be a loaded term packaged as an ideal that the non-western world is expected to attain. Conservatives object to the denigration of their culture and their identity (Freij and Sawalha 2001). Gole (1996, 13) captures the essence of conservatives’ discourse, by stating “the concept of [modern] civilization is not a neutral, value-free concept; to the contrary it specifies the superiority of the West and attributes universality to a specifically western cultural model.”

Before discussing the Islamist discourse, I want to distinguish between Islam and Islamism or Islamist. Islam is the religion, a belief system; it is about theology whereas Islamism is a political movement.<sup>11</sup> Karam (1998) and Naqshabandi (1995) point to three main discourses in Islam: official Islam, popular Islam and political Islam, also referred to as Islamist discourse. The common reference point is Islamic faith, yet the manner in which Islam is manipulated by each discourse to reach its political ends differs. Official Islamic discourse is based on religious scholars’ (*ulama*) interpretation of Qur’anic texts and *hadith*. It encompasses a range of modes of operation and ideologies. Popular Islamic discourse is the discourse based on the locals’ practice and interpretation of Islam, and is influenced by changes in social practices and mores.

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<sup>10</sup> For a critique on the notion of tribalism see Bint Talal (2001); Eickelman (1988, 1998); Layne (1994).

<sup>11</sup> I use the term Islamism and Islamist interchangeably.



It is considered to be weakly linked to the textual interpretation of Islam.<sup>12</sup> Political Islamic discourse spans a range of discourses: militant, conservative and reformist<sup>13</sup> (Zubaida 2001). Islamists treat Islam as a monolithic religio-political construct that is an alternative to competing western ideologies (Afsaruddin 1999). Militant Islamists are associated with the far right Islamist politics (Winter 2001). Conservative Islamists call for a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, while reformist Islamists call for a progressive interpretation to ensure that Islam remains the religion for every time and place (Nachtwey and Tessler 1999). As a project of political mobilization, Badran (2001, 48) considers Islamism a tool for individuals "to express their religious identity in public as they see fit." Essentially, the Islamist discourse is concerned with how to deal with modern social, political, economic and cultural predicaments facing society using the *shari'a*, while lacking historical precedents in Islamic tradition (Beinin and Stork 1997a).

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is the most powerful Islamist group in Jordan. Its strength and popularity is attributed to its social welfare activity. With the resumption of political life in 1989, the MB was able to mobilise public opinion, and succeeded in forming the largest and most powerful block in parliament. The establishment (royal family, senate and political elites) considered them a threat because they opposed the establishment's pro-western approach towards the country's socio-politico-economic development, and any peace efforts with Israel

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<sup>12</sup> Afshar (1999), Mernissi (1987a), Sabbah (1984) and Wadud (1999) caution individuals to distinguish between the interpretations of the Qur'an, and the Qur'anic texts. They note that over time Qur'anic interpretations have acquired a greater importance than the Qur'anic text itself. Stowasser (1984) notes that the interpreters of the Qur'an interpreted the Qur'anic texts according to their existing reality, rather than the nature of the Islamic society when the Qur'an was revealed. She contrasts the explanation of the verse 4:34 by al-Tabari (d. 923) with the more restrictive interpretation of al-Baydawi (d. 1286) 350 years later.

<sup>13</sup> Reformists are also referred to in the literature as progressive Islamists. Scholars such as Afshar (1999); Badran (2001); Keddie (1998); Beinin and Stork (1997a) are critical of social scientists that elide the terms Islamist (considered as moderates) with fundamentalist.

(Boulby 1999; Moaddel 2002). The MB also tried to institute policies to Islamify the country (Brand 1998a). Their slogan was and is: “Islam is the solution”, and their discourse is considered to be anti-western and anti-Zionist (Taraki 1996, 1995). Islamists perceive society first as Islamic and then Arab and tribal. To them Islam is both a mode of conduct and a set of beliefs. They call on the state to base its laws strictly on the *shari’a* and advocate for an Islamic modernity (Freij and Sawalha 2001).

## MORAL DISCOURSE

The moral discourse deals with the pace of social change and changes in social mores. Because women are considered the reproducers of generations, preservers of cultural authenticity, and transmitters of morality and social values (Joseph and Slyomovics 2001; Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999) they are perceived as the “culturer [sic] bearers and moral exemplars of the nation” (Afsaruddin 1999, 18). Consequently, women and their position in society take centre stage in this debate, and are seen as barometers of social change. For example, a moral debate ensued in Jordan when the establishment in September 1999 attempted to abolish Article 340 of the Jordanian penal code. The code gives reduced or lenient sentencing to males who murder their female kin for dishonouring the family called “crimes of honour.” The debate on crimes of honour underscores the importance society places on women’s honour, their position in society, and the sensitive nature of honour. The debate serves to reinforce “proper” gender relations in society and is illustrative of the nature of the moral discourse. Freij and Sawalha (2001) examined societal attitudes towards crimes of honour and found three discourses used to discuss this issue.

The liberal-secular discourse is about women's right to exercise their agency without fear. Liberal-secularists call on the state to guarantee women's safety and freedom of choice. In contrast the importance of maintaining the morality of society by restricting women's agency is the focus of the conservative discourse. Conservatives are alarmed by the behaviour of young adults, especially those in Western Amman. They emphasise the protection of what they call tribal-Islamic values, mainly "the family honour." Their discourse blames women for the decline of society's social mores, and they justify the murder of women in the name of protecting the family honour and moral fibre of society from westoxification. The Islamist discourse believes that society's morality is preserved when individuals live according to the principles of Islam. Women are instructed to veil and abide by Islamic precepts. Based on my interviews with Islamist feminists two sub-discourses emerged. I define Islamist feminists as veiled women who are political activists in the MB in Jordan.

Reformist Islamists encourage women's participation in the public sphere as long as they veil, act modestly and meet their family's needs. Conservative Islamists believe that a woman who seeks paid work abandons her Islamic duty of caring for her family. Her paid work is considered unnecessary since her husband is obliged to support her financially (*yanfiq 'alaiha*).<sup>14</sup> Conservative Islamists believe that women in the paid labour force are acting against the Islamic principle of complementarity (*takamul*), consequently harming both their family and society. The principle of complementarity is based on the natural differences between men and women. Each sex has its own specific role and each function in accordance to its natural disposition ensuring a harmonious coexistence. Their roles are complementary, and of equal value and importance (Afshar 1999; Fa'uri 1999) promoting what is known in Arabic as *al-maslaha al-*

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<sup>14</sup> Within this context, *yanfiq* in Arabic means the act of financially supporting someone. It originates from the word *nafaqa*. *Nafaqa* means a woman's allowance or maintenance.

*'amma*, the general public's good/interest, as well as the family's well-being. Conservative Islamists claim that a woman's presence in the public realm, even when veiled, entices men, causing social chaos (*fitna*).<sup>15</sup> Thus, the moral discourse is tied up with sexuality, power, notions of masculinity and femininity, and gender relations. The manner in which the various discourses manipulate Islam has created some thorny problems for gender issues in the Middle East (Abu-Lughod 2001)

#### ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Abu-Lughod (1998) argues that the issue of gender in the Arab world is a highly charged nationalist issue tied up in complex ways with the West.<sup>16</sup> She is referring to the history of debates about women and the veil, the West claiming that the veil symbolised Arab women's oppression, justifying their colonialist projects, and Arabs treating the veil as a symbol of their Arab nationalism, identity and struggle for independence. The debates evolved. Today Arab women and their actions symbolise their respective countries' socio-cultural-politico-economic development. Against this backdrop, Abu-Lughod (2001) states that scholars writing about Arab and Muslim Middle Eastern women are in a precarious situation because they are

Caught between the ... incompatible projects of representing Middle East women as complex agents (that is, not as passive victims of Islamic or "traditional" culture), mostly to the West, and advocating their rights at home, which usually involves a

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<sup>15</sup> See Mernissi (1987a, 1991) and Sabbah (1984) for an in-depth analysis on this matter.

<sup>16</sup> For a historical tracing on this subject refer to Ahmed (1992). Refer to Shirazi (2001) who examines the role and use of the veil in western and eastern popular culture and its symbolic importance. Regarding the academic debate, see Abu-Lughod's (1989) article, which gives a critique of the anthropological discourse on the Arab World, and Arab women. Also see Abu-Lughod (1998, 2001); Abu-Zeid (1999); Afshar (1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1997); Badran (1999, 2001); Chatty and Rabo (1997); Fernea (2000); Gole (2000); Kandiyoti (1991a, 1996b, 2002); Joseph and Slyomovics (2001); Keddie (2002); Malti-Douglas (1991); Moghadam (1993, 1994); Moghissi (1999); Nelson and Altorki (1997); Rai and Lievesley (1996); Said (1995); Sabbagh (1996); Werbner and Yuval-Davis (1999); Yamani (1996a).

critique of local patriarchal structures. The problem with the latter is that it can easily be appropriated as native confirmation of already negative and simplistic images (p. 107).

I share her sentiment because the PEJW I interviewed have repeatedly recounted personal experiences pointing out westerners' misconceptions about them as Arab-Jordanian women, and requested me to rectify their image in this text. In summary, Islam, Arab culture, women, their place in society and morality are intertwined in the three discourses. Issues of Arab-Jordanian nationality, cultural heritage, nationalism and Islam intersect to construct the identity of Jordanian women (Nelson and Altorki 1997). The repercussion of this discourse has been felt by Jordanian feminists, and will be discussed in chapter five.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES AND BELIEFS AFFECTING PEJW

Having already identified the three typologies within the moral and political discourses I chose to label women who believed in the strict application of Islam and were involved in Muslim Brotherhood/Sisterhood as Islamist women, those who elided tradition with religion as conservative women, and those who gravitated toward international human rights model as liberal-secular women. Veiled women referred to their head cover as the *hijab*. Since many scholars use the term Islamic and Islamist interchangeably, I will use the term Islamic to mean Muslim women who wear the *hijab*.<sup>17</sup>

During my fieldwork<sup>18</sup> the women stressed the importance of obedience (*ta'a*), disobedience (*nushuz*),<sup>19</sup> complementarity, family ties and obligations, family honour and reputation. These notions influenced all the women, Christians or Muslims alike, because Islam is the religion of

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<sup>17</sup> Badran (1999, 168) refers to the veil that women donned in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> as the "new hijab."

<sup>18</sup> The time I spent in Jordan conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups.

<sup>19</sup> Wadud (1999, xxvi) defines it as "recalcitrance, disruption of marital harmony."

the State and laws governing women's lives (known as personal status laws), are based on the *shari'a*.<sup>20</sup> The extent to which women made reference to these notions in their daily life depended on whether they believed in firstly, the strict application of Islamic law; secondly, the conflation of religious beliefs with local traditions (popular Islam) or thirdly, aspirations of notions of international human rights model. Women's understanding of *ta'a* and *nushuz* varied. With regard to their parents, women stressed the notion of obeying their parents (*ta'aet al-walidein*) and pleasing their parents (*rida al-walidein*). They often cited the Qur'anic verse (*sura*) XVII: 23-24. With regard to their current or future husbands, some women believed that a woman must completely obey her husband (*at-ta'a al-mutlaqa*), others stated that Islam did not require a woman's blind obedience, but rather urged women and men to discuss their plans, and counselled both to seek each other's advice to ensure harmony and stability in the family. A few believed that Islam imposed on women the need to ask their husband for permission to leave the house or seek paid employment.<sup>21</sup> In Islam the notions of *ta'a*, *nushuz* and *qiwama*<sup>22</sup> are interlinked, and are a source of vexation for women. The Qur'anic verse IV: 34 explains the linkage of these concepts. This verse has been interpreted in various ways. I have juxtaposed four different translations of this verse and italicised the quotes related to *qiwama* and *nushuz*, to point up varied viewpoints on the issues. My point is not about the "correct" interpretation of this verse,<sup>23</sup> but about how it is explained and how each woman understands it affects her decision-making and her perception of her possibilities. Below are the four versions.

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<sup>20</sup> There is an exception for Christian women who abide by the code of Canon Law in all matters relating to marital issues.

<sup>21</sup> Graziani (1976-77) notes that according to customary law a husband is considered to have three basic rights over his wife: the right of her sexual services; the right to grant her domestic responsibilities in the household, and the right to her obedience. See also Al-Khayyat (1990); Sha'aban (1996).

<sup>22</sup> The exact meaning of this word is contested. It has been explained as men's authority over women, men as protectors, and/or maintainers of women, as I will show in the following pages.

<sup>23</sup> Feminist scholars have challenged the misogynist interpretations of the Qur'an. See Afshar (1999); Awde (2000); Mernissi (1987a, 1991); Stowasser (1984, 1987b, 1998); Wadud (1998).

*Men have authority over women because Allah [God] has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because Allah has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. (Dawood 1974).*

*Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great. (Shakir n.d.)*

*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all). (Ali 1991)*

*Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great. (Pickthall 197-)*

With the exception of Ali's (1991) translation, which advocates a three-step approach, with a light beating as the last resort in disciplining a wife, <sup>24</sup> the other three allow men to beat their wives if they disobey. The controversy about the meaning of this *sura* and its implication for

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<sup>24</sup> In many ways the interpretations of *sura* IV:34 resembles the *Legal Doctrine of Coverture* codified into English Law during the Middle Ages, whereby the wife's identity was merged into that of her husband and she became a "legal nonperson and lost the right to act on her own behalf" (Coltrane, 1998, 144). In my fieldwork, some women believed that obedience was strictly relegated to their sexual lives.



women remains the subject of debate for many feminist scholars.<sup>25</sup> Whether men are protectors, maintainers, in-charge of, have authority over women, or instil fear in women is important since it influences the marital relationship between the husband and wife. Women's understanding of *ta'a*, *nushuz* and *qiwama* influences what they consider to be their marital duties and obligations, and their husbands' rights over them. The notion of disobedience is of great importance for women, because it is linked with punishment (Afshar 1999). However, as Wadud (1999) claims the Qur'an never orders a woman to obey her husband, since the term *nushuz* is used for both males and females, therefore, she concludes *nushuz* cannot mean a woman's disobedience to her husband. By stressing the notion of complementarity and obedience women are implying that it is their responsibility to keep the family unit intact. They are struggling to live up to the socio-religious ideal of venerated mothers and wives. Watson (1994) captures the importance society places on maintaining the family unit when describing Egyptian women's strategies to resolve their marital disputes. Women resort to family members and friends to help bring about reconciliation. The women fear being accused of neglecting their primary duty, leading to their divorce and loss of social status. They know that they gain social recognition when they are able to keep their family intact in spite of being in a difficult marriage.

## FAMILY BONDS

There is a body of work looking at family ties and the whole set of family obligations among Christian and Muslim women in the Arab world.<sup>26</sup> Women are expected to maintain strong

<sup>25</sup> See Abdul-Rauf (1979); Afshar (1999); Antoun (1968); Karam (1998); Mernissi (1987a, 1991); Sha'aban (2000); Stowasser (1998); UNIFEM (1999); Wadud (1999).

<sup>26</sup> Refer to the works of Abu-Lughod (1986, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1998); Al-Khayyat (1990); Altorki (1977, 1986); Beck and Keddie (1978); Davis (1993); Hanssen-Bauer, Pederson, and Tiltne (1998); Jean-Klein (2000); Kavar (1997); MacLeod (1992); Maher (1984); Meneley (1996); Mernissi (1982, 1987a); Moors (1995); Sa'ar (2001); Sabbagh (1996); Sha'aban (1996); Shami (1997); Shami and Taminian (1990); Sherif (1999); Shukri (1996); Singerman (1995); Vom Bruck (1997); Watson (1994); Whitehead (1984).



family bonds with their natal and/or conjugal extended families. Their primary social obligations are first to their families and kin, next to their neighbours and friends, with friends considered the more distant social obligations. Failure to fulfil their social obligations is considered to be shameful, (*'aib*) and offensive (Meneley 1996). Papanek (1979) defines this work as “family status production work” because it is unpaid work, invisible, time consuming, and involves many activities with the aim of improving the social status of the family within the community. In the Arab world, the activities include maintaining and strengthening family links with one’s immediate and extended family, recognising key life-cycle events, and improving community relationships. Women accomplish these tasks through reciprocal visits and acting as generous hostesses when receiving visitors. By maintaining family connections and through their display of caring and generosity, women improve their family bonds, fulfil their family and social obligations, improve their family’s honourable social status in the eyes of society, protect their positioning as dutiful wives and daughters, and gain informal power (Abu Lughod 1990; Altorki 1986; Meneley 1996). Brothers are entrusted to monitor their sisters’ behaviour to protect the family’s honour (Joseph 1994, 1999a). From the cited literature one deduces that familial bonds work as a hidden hand constraining, empowering and forming individual members’ actions. Joseph (1999a) stresses the strength of the family bonds in her concept of “connectivity.” Through her notion of connectivity she encapsulates the socio-cultural practice whereby Arab women are seen and treated as members of their family, and not as separate individuals.

### *Connectivity is an alternative model of selfhood*

Joseph (1999a, 1999c) is critical of the western-centric model of a version of selfhood and individuation that valorises the self-contained individual who is autonomous, bounded, and separate from others. She opposes the notion that any model, other than this particular western

model of selfhood, is considered both dysfunctional and pathological, specifically the designation of a "relational self"<sup>27</sup> as immature and lacking agency (1999a, 4). She stresses the significance of historical, social and cultural patterns that shape the self. She advocates the consideration of other models of "selving" that take into account cultures where individuals are identified with their family, where the family is valued over the person and one's identity is defined in familial terms. She argues that the self is always situated, contextualised and embedded in relationships. To her, selving is the process of socially constructing one's personal self, which is continuous, contradictory and "impinged upon by social and cultural processes" (1999a, 2).

Connectivity is her relational theory of selfhood, and takes into consideration culturally specific differences based on gender, age, race, class, religion, ethnicity and power. It is about individuals embedded in "relational matrices that shape the sense of self but do not deny them their distinctive initiative and agency" (1999a, 11). These relational matrices are always shifting and situational giving rise to various notions of self, which coexist in each person. She defines connectivity as

Relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others ... Connectivity exists side by side with individualism in the same culture and perhaps in the same person. These are not oppositional polarities (1999c, 189).

It is through connectivity that one's self is shaped. Joseph asserts that her definition allows researchers to examine the dynamics of individualism and the interplay between one's relationality and individualism. Contrary to Joseph who treats connectivity as "an activity or an

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<sup>27</sup> By relational Joseph (1999a, 7) means, "less individuated with more fluid boundaries."

intention" rather than a state of being (1999a, 12), I see connectivity as both an activity and a state of being.

## DISCOURSE OF HONOUR

The discourse of honour is subsumed under the moral discourse. In Arabic, honour is *sharaf*, and family honour as *'ird*. *Sharaf*, argues Dodd (1973, 42), "can be acquired and augmented through right behaviour and great achievements, whereas *'ird* can only be lost by the misconduct of the woman. And once lost, it cannot be regained." *Sharaf* determines one's image in society (Feghali 1997). The discourse on honour has a long-standing history,<sup>28</sup> and the literature leaves no doubt about one thing: honour is gendered. For men, honour means courage, independence, and keeping one's word – all characteristics of male independence. For women it means modesty, chastity, purity, deference, obedience and dependence. Women maintain their honour through their acts of modesty, since their honour symbolises their family and male kin's honour (Abu-Lughod 1986). Modesty according to Abu-Lughod (1985, 648) "is a complex cultural concept that refers to both an internal state of embarrassment and shyness, and a repertoire of behaviours indicative of this state, including downcast eyes, silence, and a general self-effacement ... It relates in a sense to sexual propriety." Hence, women's practices are vital to their family's reputation and social status (Meneley 1996). Given the social emphasis on women's honour it has acquired an "exchange value", transforming it into a pseudo-commodity, a capital good (Delaney 1987, 4). Men, whose honour is dependent on their women folk's sexuality, keep a watchful eye on their women, fearful of losing their honour and honourable

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<sup>28</sup> Refer to the work of Abu-Lughod (1986); Abu-Odeh (1993, 1996); Al-Khayyat (1990); Antoun (1968, 1972); Afsaruddin (1999); Badran (1999); Bourdieu (1965, 1977, 1990); Delaney (1987); Dodd (1973); Gilmore (1987a, 1987b), Giovannini (1987), Haeri (1999); Joseph (1988); Joseph and Slyomovics (2001); Jowkar (1986); Nelson (1997); Parla (2001); Peristiany (1965); Sa'ar (2001); Seikaly (1998); Wikan (1984).

standing in society. To uphold their masculinity men try to prove to the male gaze their ability to control their women (Johnson 1997). This means women are vested with immense negative power. Those who circumvent the notion of honour risk being labelled dishonourable and endanger their connectivity with their family. This explains continued preoccupation with reputation and the perception of others. Antoun (1968) examines the discourse of honour in Jordan. He argues that it is situated in both religious and social custom, and consists of three referents

It refers narrowly to patterns of coverage for various parts of the body; more broadly to various character traits-bashfulness, ... shyness; and most widely to institutions often associated with the above - the customs and beliefs relating to chastity, fidelity, purity, .... and inferiority of women, to the superiority of men, to the legitimacy of children, and to the honour of the group (p. 672).

He stresses the point that honour is linked to several issues including the act of covering one's bodily parts, one's character traits and personal practices. These all have a direct bearing on honour and honour of kinship group. He remarks that the idioms people use reflect their understanding of honour. As a glimpse of the current local understandings on honour, I will quote a phrase by a Jordanian member of parliament (MP), in September 1999, during a conference attended on crimes of honour. The MP said, "a sign of a man's masculinity is his ability to swear on the honour of his female kin" (*'alamet ar-rujula maqdiret ar-rajul 'an yahlif bi sharaf banat al 'a'ila*).<sup>29</sup>

Abu Odeh (1993, 1996) underscores the importance Jordanian society places on women's virginity by coining the term "hymenization." She argues that Jordanian women's positioning as

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<sup>29</sup> The conference was held on 26 and 27 September, 1999, in Amman, and entitled "Honour crimes - what progress?"

honourable depends on their virginity before marriage, their “physical hymen”, which cannot be separated from their “bodily” and “social” hymens. Women’s physical appearance, their style of dress constitutes their bodily hymen, whereas their conduct in society and the manner in which their comportment is perceived represents their social hymen. Honour for Jordanian women is inextricably linked with virginity before marriage, deference, obedience, comportment, mannerisms of speech and positive reputation.

### *Indirect Mode of Communication: Being Subtle*

Ayish (1998) notes that the Arab culture is an oral culture, and places a high value on conversational modes of communication and the use of proverbs.<sup>30</sup> Feghali (1997, 359) examines the communicative style in Arabic texts and notes a style that favours repetition, elaborateness and indirectness. A common form of indirect speech, which many of the participants used, is *musayara*, which literally means, “to accommodate” and “go along with.” It is a style of speech where individuals circumvent being direct. Throughout my fieldwork I was constantly reminded by married and single women alike of the importance of the art of skilful communication. Two particular proverbs were often articulated “If you know how to handle a person properly, you’ll have them eating out of the palm of your hand” (*‘iza biti’rafi kif tit’amali ma’ al-shakhs, rah yakul min ‘idaiki*); and, “If you know how to talk to your husband, you’ll wrap him around your finger” (*‘iza biti’rafi kif tihki ma’ jozek bitliffi ‘ala isba’ik*). Initially when I heard these proverbs, I found myself getting angry and quietly saying “why can’t you just be upfront and say what is on your mind?” In this section I will attempt to unravel possible underlying causes.

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<sup>30</sup> For use of proverbs see Abu-Lughod (1990); Antoun (1968).

Assertiveness (*'akhadit mawkif* or *faredit shakhsiti*)<sup>31</sup> is a characteristic that men strive for and women evade. For the former it symbolises masculinity, and the latter impropriety. In a woman assertiveness equates to being confrontational and aggressive, a belief shared by all the females and males interviewed. Confrontation in Jordan is considered an attack on a person's honour (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1994). An assertive woman in Jordan is labelled *qawiyya*. *Qawiyya* originates from the root word meaning strong. Yet, when applied to women it acquires a negative connotation: a derogatory term implying being overly strong, and excessive assertiveness, a transgression of the boundaries of modesty and femininity. This behaviour is considered inappropriate for a woman who is expected to be in a "position of dependency or social inferiority" (Abu-Lughod 1986, 109). An assertive woman in the eyes of others is disrespectful, because honour is two-pronged: "it is the value of a person in [her]/his own eyes, but also in the eyes of society" (Pitt-Rivers 1965, 21). Therefore, an assertive woman gains the reputation of being aggressive and confrontational for violating her boundaries.

The literature on Arab women documents ways women have turned their style of communication into an asset.<sup>32</sup> It also notes the process is not easy and women struggle to maintain a fine line between being respectable and lacking repute (Sa'ar 2001). Acquiring an unflattering reputation places a Jordanian woman in a precarious position: open to *kalam in-nas* (people's talk – gossip and its sinister effects). *Kalam in-nas* "is portrayed as the most devastating thing in life ... it has the power, unscrupulously, to transform everything you do and do not do into evidence of shame. And you are fully at its mercy" (Wikan 1991, 165).

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<sup>31</sup> This is the most common way PEJW referred to assertiveness in Arabic.

<sup>32</sup> For detailed examples refer to Abu-Lughod (1985, 1986, 1990); Kavar (1997); Mahmood (2001); Watson (1994).

### *Gossip and reputation*

As in some other societies, Jordanian women fear gossip.<sup>33</sup> Women know that if they violate the social norms, they are subject to character assassination through gossip: the sully of their reputation (Meneley 1996), which creates an atmosphere of intimidation infecting all women. Since women cannot afford to be thought of negatively, they are inclined to avoid being the centre of gossip. Many of the PEJW I interviewed mentioned being hurt by gossip, and tended to keep the majority of their relationships with others superficial. Gossip in Jordan is socially more damaging than it is in the West. The consequence of gossip in Jordan is austere: social death, given that it is predominantly an oral culture (Ayish 1998). In her research on Iraqi women Al-Khayyat (1990, 23) concludes, "Gossip operates as one of the strongest forms of social control, particularly in policing women. Because moral reputation is so important, girls' lives are greatly affected by it." Women cannot afford a bad reputation since it jeopardizes their families and their own social positioning. Consequently, their bad reputation might affect their connectivity with their family, which is their main support system. Effectively, an ill-reputed woman causes not only her own social death but also that of her family.

### *WASTA*

*Wasta* refers to both the act and the person. *Wasit* is a mediator who intercedes on behalf of others to either resolve a conflict or to advocate assistance. Bourdieu (1977, 238) refers to the *wasit* as a door through which conflicting groups can enter into agreement without "losing face." *Wasta* is usually sought when a person assumes his/her goal is unattainable (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993). Basically, it is a system of mediation where a third party intervenes on ones'

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<sup>33</sup> For a thorough examination of the subject matter see Bailey (1971) and Scott (1985).

behalf to accomplish a task. The process involves the supplicant requesting a favour from the *wasit*, a well-connected person, to commence the act of *wasta*. It is also known in the literature as the patron-client relationship (Farrag 1977). Jordanians refer to *wasta* as a tribal practice. Usually, it is the less advantaged who seek help from their well-connected family members and friends. The higher the connection, the more likely the requested desire is fulfilled – yet this is not guaranteed. Sharabi (1988, 46) argues that *wasta* is a unique system because “everyone involved in it stands to gain.” His view is androcentric, and overlooks the implications when women use *wasta*. *Wasta* is gendered with males acting on behalf of their female relatives using a male *wasit*. The lack of a female *wasta* system (Amawi 2001; Layne 1994) is problematic given that returning a favour has a sexual connotation for women.

*Wasta* has become a way of life in Jordan as historically established local practices deriving from a state-less political system became enmeshed with the modern bureaucratic state structures. It is considered the “hidden social force” (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993). It has evolved from being a form of mediation to a form of intercession to speed up a process; to provide access to goods and services that are inaccessible to the average person, or who are unfamiliar with the system; to soften the rigidity of bureaucracy; and to seek personal benefits such as job promotions, scholarships and jobs. Although *wasta* has given government bureaucracy a human face, Jordanian social scientists blame it for creating a culture of dependency (Amawi 2001), apathy, anger, frustration and corruption (Kilani and Sakijha 2002, Sakijha and Sa'eda 2000). Currently, the establishment is trying to rid the bureaucratic system of *wasta*. The task is daunting since the royal family has historically resorted to a form of *wasta*, known as *mahsubiyya*. To reward a tribe for the loyal service of one of its members, the royal family would appoint another tribal member to a prestigious public post, sustaining the power of



the tribalist ideology.<sup>34</sup> The practice of *wasta* has directly impacted on the lives of PEJW I interviewed.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: JORDANIAN WOMEN AND WORK

The “new” Arab woman is the term bestowed on the first female professional in the family (Maher 1978; Mai 1996a; Mohsen 1985). Her family and society perceive her as challenging the boundaries of her social hymen. Married professional women are criticised for their inability to live up to the socio-religious ideal of wifehood and motherhood (Sherif 1999), and single women are criticised for failing to attract marriage partners and fulfil their socio-religious obligations of being mothers (Shukri 1996). The literature notes that single and married professional Arab women experience internal tensions as they attempt to establish a harmonious coexistence between their families’ needs and support, professional life and personal desires (MacLeod 1992; Sa’ar 2001; Singerman 1995; Watson 1994). The PEJW in this study are new women.

Young, Wolkowitz, and McCullagh (1984), and Fernea (2000) are critical of the assumption that women’s influence, power and status are enhanced when they earn an income. Werthmann (1999) illustrates that Muslim women’s financial contribution to their family does not mean that their relationship with their male kin is transformed into an egalitarian one. Several scholars on Arab and Muslim Middle Eastern women question if women’s paid employment enables them to

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<sup>34</sup> For an in-depth account of King Hussein’s use of tribalism as a trope to unify the country, and his status as the “sheikh of sheikhs”, the ultimate *wasta* in the country, refer to Layne (1994). For other views on this matter see Al-Abbadi (1982); bin Muhammad (1999); Rogan (1999); Salibi (1998); Shryock (1997a, 1997b); Wilson (1987).

exercise fully their agency.<sup>35</sup> Before reviewing the literature on Jordanian women and work, I will briefly outline social attitudes towards women in the public sphere.

In Jordan, it was socially acceptable for Jordanian women to perform social services on a voluntary basis. Objections were heard when women joined the paid labour force, since it was assumed that if women worked that meant their fathers, brothers or husbands were either unable or unwilling to support them, reflecting negatively on their male kin (El Guindi 1999). Naqshabandi (1995) claims that Jordanian women entered the labour force, to work in government agencies, in 1947 despite social opposition.<sup>36</sup> Today, the majority of Jordanian women work in the government sector: mainly education, health and social work, because of job security and short working hours (El Kharouf 2000). Jordanian women's participation in the work force has slowly increased from 3.3% in 1961 (Flynn and Oldham 1999) to its current level of 13.4% (UNDP 2002). Alaiwat (2001) notes that only 0.2% of the female work force holds upper management jobs. Christian women have a higher participation rate than Muslim women, and most women stop working after marriage (Kalimat and Tiltne 1998). Sabbagh (1997) notes that women's average years of work are around eight, except for the highly educated where 50% work longer. In spite of government legislation enacted to encourage women's economic participation, the desired effect has failed to appear (UNDP 2002). Research suggests that the majority of Jordanians surveyed believed that a woman's place is home. Society's attitude to women's participation in political and public life is negative especially among young males between the ages of 20 – 24, who believe that women are less competent than men (Flynn and

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<sup>35</sup> Refer to the studies by Afsaruddin (1999); Al-Hindawi (1998); Al-Khayyat (1990); Al-Kutba and Konrad-Adenauer (1998); Al-Zubn (1993); Awad and Arneberg (1998); Davis (1978, 1993); Freij (2002); Kavar (1997); Maher (1978, 1984); Mehra and Feldstein (1998); Sa'ar (2001); Sabbagh (1997); Shami and Taminian (1990); Sherif (1999); Shukri (1996); Tucker (1993b).

<sup>36</sup> For a critique of the state's role in encouraging women to enter the labour force and then withdrawing its support see *Womanpower* by Hijab (1998).

Oldham 1999; Hanssen-Bauer, Pederson, and Tiltne 1998; Shtewi, Warikat, and Al-'Umoush 1995). Reflecting on society's attitude towards women and work, judge Taghrid Hikmat, the first female judge in Jordan, (personal interview, June 23, 2000) said:

The rapid changes we are experiencing are related to the quick demographic shifts we've gone through, the rapid population growth, the building boom, the influx of many Jordanians back to Jordan with their own image of the social status of a woman. Some of these people see a woman's place as only her home. We are still caught in a time warp when people are still debating whether a woman should or should not work, even though her income is needed and her participation is crucial towards the development of this nation. However, there still remains a large segment of this society, about one half of it that still discusses whether she should work. No one values her role in society.

Qualitative studies on women and work in Jordan are limited. Kavar (1997) examined poor urban single working women's struggles at home and work, while Shami (1990) and Shukri (1996) studied rural and poor urban married and single women's struggles at home and work. The studies noted that most of the difficulties women faced revolved around the family's need to maintain its honour when the women worked in the family business or for others. From these studies I deduced that although the women worked out of economic necessity, their employment did not increase their personal freedoms; rather, it caused them personal and familial tensions. Sabbagh (1997) examined 412 female civil servants. She studied their motivations to work, meaning of work, facilitating and impeding factors affecting work, and evaluation of themselves at work. She noted that employers viewed married women as less reliable than single women, and women who advanced at work developed strategies to distance themselves from family responsibilities, by employing help. Fathers' and husbands' moral support were facilitating factors in women's professional careers.

Prior to my fieldwork the studies available were mainly quantitative studies lacking in-depth information about women's relationship with their families, family dynamics, how women exercised their agency and factors influencing their decision-making.<sup>37</sup> I wanted to know if elite professional women fared better than urban and rural working women, and how PEJW exercised their agency at home and work given the strong emphasis on family honour. Because of the gap in the literature on PEJW, I turned to studies on elite professional, working women in the Arab world and noted a few (Altorki 1977; Meneley 1996; Sherif 1999; Vom Bruck 1997). Most studies were on rural and urban poor to middle income working class women, and the majority of them focused on women in Egypt, Morocco and Yemen. Although all Arab countries are perceived as a unit, they differ with respect to their socio-politico-economic development: their colonial histories, and their mode and time of entry into the global capitalist economy.<sup>38</sup> I found Sherif's (1999) research on Egyptian elite professional women the most helpful. She underlined women's struggles as they tried to fit the dominant cultural representation of women, which is influenced by the Islamist discourse, with the realities of their lives. Egypt's socio-politico-economic development differs so much from Jordan's, reassuring that my study could be of some value.

## CONCLUSION

Because of their access to education and employment, women's sense of entitlement has expanded. However, this does not guarantee that professional women can exercise fully their

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<sup>37</sup> Al-Hindawi (1998); Flynn and Oldham (1999); Hanssen-Bauer, Pederson, and Tiltne (1998); Kavar (1997); Sabbagh (1997); Salem-Pickarts, Dajani, and Ali (1995); Shakhathreh (1995); Shami (1997); Shami and Tamanian (1990); Shtewi and Daghasani (1994); Shtewi, Warikat, and Al-'Umoush (1995); Shukri (1996); Tubbeh (1994). Two studies were available after the completion of my data gathering: 'Alaiwat (2001); El Kharouf (2000).

<sup>38</sup> For in-depth discussion see Afshar (1992, 1996); Beinin and Stork (1997b); Bint Talal (2001); Brand (1994, 1998a); Haddad (1998); Kandiyoti (1991c, 1996b, 2002); Moghadam (1993, 1995, 1998); Richards and Waterbury (1996); UNDP (2002).

agency. Their actions are circumscribed for several interconnected reasons. Firstly, women are regarded as the very personification of honour (Haeri 1999). Secondly, their honour has a direct bearing on their male kin and family's honour. Thirdly, women's identity is based on their connectivity with their family. Fourthly, women's moral, social and economic support relies on connectivity to family. This means that professional Jordanian women cannot afford to dismiss local practices and understandings of honour. To do so means they enter into the "politics of reputation" (Bailey 1971) and risk their own and their family's social death. In the next chapter I will examine the conceptual framework that guided me in my data gathering and analysis.

# CHAPTER TWO

## CUSTOMISED THEORETICAL APPROACH

This chapter gives an account of my research methodology; divided into four main sections: Firstly, the conceptual framework guiding my research study. Secondly, the methodology, thirdly, the methods followed for data generation, and fourthly, the analysis. The first section is about the theoretical approach and describes the lenses I used to see reality, accounting for the rationale underlying my research plan, and my choice of research design. Provision of information on these is necessary to clarify the assumptions underpinning the research (Crotty 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Silverman 2000, 2001).

## THEORETICAL APPROACH

This involves explicating the overall framework relied on, the basic elements it contains (ontology) and the type and nature of its knowledge (epistemology). Both these issues are linked (Crotty 1998; Silverman 2001). To understand PEJW's agentic action as they navigate between home and work entails unravelling the relationship between their agency and the structures in which they are embedded. I draw on theoretical approaches that attempt to resolve the agency-structure debate, and avoid the structuralist's or voluntarist's view of reality. Structuralism implies treating society and its structures as a system of relationships that determine the activities of the members of society (Jenks 1998). Voluntarism means focusing only on agency, treating society and its structures as being composed from "actions of its individual members who are agents of their own actions and produce their relationships with one another in terms of

this agency” (Walsh 1998, 9). Agency is a concept used to convey the degree of free will exercised by individuals in their social action. Individuals express their agency according to the degree of constraints they experience from structure. Individuals’ agencies differ depending on the context they are embedded in (Walsh 1998). Agency is associated with terms such as motivation, will, possessiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom and creativity (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

The concept of social structure is ambiguous, and differs from one author to another. Some authors refer to it as a system (Ortner 1984), while others use it interchangeably with culture (Wendt 1999). Giddens (1984, 23) defines it as “rules and resources” produced and reproduced by actors in their practices. Bourdieu (1977) avoids a specific definition. He refers to structure as, what is not agency, emphasising that agency belongs to the subjective realm, thus, relegating structure to the objective realm. One can consider Bourdieu’s concept of objective conditions of existence as structure. Connell (1987) is interested in the components constituting structure, and how these component structures (substructures) influence human practice. He considers structure as being complex, dynamic, made and remade, vulnerable to major changes in practice, and its form possibly changing over time. He treats structure as an organized field of human practice and social relations. He argues that practice “responds to, and is constrained by, the circumstances which those structures constitute” (p. 17). He considers constraints as a complex interplay of powers that operate through various social institutions. By institution he means custom, routine and repetition occurring in a cyclical fashion.

I draw on two major works, Bourdieu (1977) and Connell (1987), and to a lesser degree on Giddens (1984) and Wendt (1999) because their theories focus on the dialectical relationship between individuals and society, arguing that both structure and agency exert a mutual influence,

a constitutive relationship. They seek to account for, and explain, the interaction between agents and structure. Their theories are processual in nature, and the themes they discuss are relevant to my work and resonate with my experience doing this research. They shed light on significant areas, such as explaining the systematic gender inequalities between men and women, while rejecting treating women as passive individuals, avoiding using patriarchy as an explanation for gender inequalities (as it precludes women's manoeuvrability), and elucidating women's options and capabilities within their context. Since this research takes place in Jordan, a developing country, I adapt their work to fit the reality of PEJW. Sylvester (1999) asserts that countries in the developing world face a host of challenges that differ from countries in the developed world. As I am interested in PEJW's standpoint, and understanding the options and capabilities they believe they have within their setting, I draw on TW feminist perspective.

#### FEMINIST AND THIRD WORLD FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES OF AGENCY

Feminists are concerned with women's subordinate status, causes of their subordination, and how to subvert their inequality. They differ in how they treat this subject matter, giving rise to multiple feminisms and feminist theories.<sup>39</sup> This section is not about a fully unified body of feminists' work. Rather, it raises concerns about how different feminists approach agency. It highlights what feminists share in common, explains the concept of standpoint, and examines how TW feminists empirically analyse women's agency.

Feminists treat male-female relationships as political (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). They attempt to uncover the reasons underlying women's subjugation and unequal social status. They

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<sup>39</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the various feminisms and their differing epistemology and suggestions to improve women's lot. For an excellent review on this subject refer to Crotty (1998); Olesen (1998); Tong (1995).



all agree that most societies are male dominated and social structure is masculinist. Their commitment is to undermine the oppressive gender-based power relations (Crotty 1998). Central questions for feminism are. How do women contribute to reproducing their own domination? And how do they resist or subvert it? Feminist researchers reject the positivist paradigm, and dispute the neutrality of the interviewer. Their epistemological perspective focuses on both the researcher and participants' positioning<sup>40</sup> (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Feminists are concerned with reflexivity - documenting the subjective experience of conducting research by critically and analytically examining the research process and reactivity – the responses of the participants to their presence (Olesen 1994, 2000) that is considered to be a source of bias (Silverman 2001). Feminists are concerned with the experiences and meanings of women's daily lives from their perspectives. This requires researchers to listen to women's accounts from *their* standpoints rather than from that of the androcentric male, rendering their life experiences invisible.<sup>41</sup>

Standpoint theory distinguishes women as being separate and different from men. Women's experiences and perspectives on life are considered just as valid as those of men. Feminist research empowers women (Smith 1987). Haraway (1988, 1991) cautions feminists against treating women's standpoints as unified. Through her concept of "situated knowledges" or "feminist objectivity" she acknowledges that women's positioning is not fixed, but relational, and that women's varied positioning affects their viewpoints and their production of knowledge. Haraway stresses the individual uniqueness of women and the diversity of their life experience. Wolf (1996b) concludes that Haraway's concept of feminist objectivity encourages researchers

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<sup>40</sup> Their social location from which they perceive, interact and analyse the world.

<sup>41</sup> Refer to Harstock (1983); Smith (1987). See also the work of Editorial Introduction (1993); Edwards and Ribbens (1998); Enslin (1994); Finch (1993); Harding (1987); Linton (1992); Maynard and Purvis (1994b); Mies (1993); Oakley (1981, 1988); Olesen (1994, 1998); Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002); Wolf (1996).

to think in terms of women's multiple perspectives and multiple subjectivities. This is what TW feminists do.<sup>42</sup> They argue that when examining TW women's lives, their lives cannot be divorced from their geo-politico-economic situations. TW feminists argue that theories of western feminism describe the reality of western women's lives in their respective developed societies. These models fail to capture the realities of women's lives in TW countries, still dealing with the effects of neo-colonialism, continued western imperialism and the challenges faced as developing nations. TW feminist theories expose the ethnocentric nature of research and make explicit the multiple subjectivities of Third World women (TWw). In their attempts to move away from the identity of TWw as "others", "less than" or "oppressed", as well as expose the institutional structures of power relations, TW feminists celebrate TWw's diverse strategizing capabilities. Kandiyoti focuses on women's modes of bargaining (1988, 1998). Agarwal (1997), Kabeer (1997, 1998), Papanek (1979, 1990), Sen (1990), and others encourage researchers to examine women's mode of bargaining, and the significance of familial cooperation in TW countries. They argue that in neo-colonial states, the state is less concerned with women's issues, and more interested in state building projects. Government policies and state laws assume women's dependence on men and reinforce it through legislation. Thus, when familial cooperation fails, women are vulnerable since they cannot rely on the state for support.

Agarwal (1997) examines women's bargaining given their "fall back" or "threat point" position. She defines fall back as women's ability to survive economically and socially outside of family if familial cooperation fails. Her concept provides insight into the range of options available to

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<sup>42</sup> Such as Abu-Iughod (2001); Accad (1991); Afkhami (2000); Afsaruddin (1999); Afshar (1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 1999); Afshar and Dennis (1992); Agarwal (1988, 1997); Ahmed (1991, 1992); Arebi (1991); Badran (1995); Beck and Keddie (1978); Barakat (1985); Chatty and Rabo (1997); Chowdhury, Nelson et al. (1994); El-Solh and Mabro (1994); Esposito (1998); Fernea (2000); Joseph and Slyomovics (2001); Kandiyoti (1991a, 1991b, 1996a, 1996b, 2002); Lazreg (1988; 1994); Minh-ha (1989); Moghadam (1993, 1998); Mohanty (1988); Narayan (1997); Nelson and Altorki (1997); Sylvester (1999); Tucker (1993); Yuval-Davis and Werbner (1999).

women. Sen (1990) puts forth his notion of cooperative-conflict. Cooperative-conflict examines simultaneously the cooperation and conflict occurring in a relationship. It highlights the unequal bargaining power of the different household members and reflects inequalities in “(a) their fall back position (b) their perceived value of their contribution to the household (c) the perceived degree of convergence between their immediate well-being and their longer-term interests and (d) differences in the ability to exercise coercion [and/or] threat” (Kabeer 1998, 101). Papanek (1990) focuses on women’s perceived interests and entitlements, while Nussbaum (2000) looks at women’s capabilities. Nussbaum defines capability as what individuals are actually able to do and be within their context, rather than what rights they have. The emphasis is on the person’s position, their opportunities, and liberties and how these factors enable or limit them.

The works cited touch on women’s connectivity but do not examine the significance of family bonds for Jordanian women. Jordanian women are not considered as separate individuals; rather, they are treated as a member of the family. For example, legally women are still registered in the family book (*daftar al ‘ai’la*). The family book is a legal document that is required for all official transactions. It is in the name of the father, the head of household, and delineates all the members of the family. Widows always and since 1998 divorced women are entitled to have the family book in their name. Divorced women are not entitled to add their children to the family book, since they remain in their fathers’ (Sawalha 1999). This document continues to reproduce women’s social and legal dependency on their male kin.

#### RELEVANT THEMES FROM BOURDIEU, CONNELL, GIDDENS AND WENDT

As a feminist researcher I followed Olesen’s (1998) advice. She urges feminist researchers to incorporate multiple approaches in qualitative feminist research, because of the complexities and

problems of their lives. In this section I will first discuss salient themes starting with Wendt, Giddens, Bourdieu and Connell respectively. They have a common approach of a dialectical relationship between agency and structure: moving away from either/or thinking to “never either, always both thinking” (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, 575). Their interest is on the degree to which agents can exercise their agentic action within the context of their situation, and how their agency is achieved. The aim in this section is to link some of their main concepts into a conceptual framework, and not to offer a critique of the theories.

As an International Relations specialist, Wendt (1999) examines the international and national/local components of structure. He argues that an agent’s characteristic alone cannot explain the result of the social outcome, and stresses the need to examine the interaction process, which is dynamic. His concern is with process rather than social outcome. His work is a form of constitutive theorizing, implying that both agent and structure shape and are shaped by each. Both are interconnected and each constitutes and reconstitutes the other. He argues that agents and structures are themselves processes. They are “on-going accomplishments of practice” (p. 313). He stresses the complex nature of structure, and examines the relationship between international/global geopolitical systems and local states. He uses the term supervenience to describe their relationship. Simply, supervenience looks at the role of both a state structure and the international system and how they interact with one another. Each exists in its own right while simultaneously shaping one another, in a dialectical process. “It describes a non-causal, non-reductive relationship of ontological dependency of one class of facts on another” (Wendt 1999, 156). His work is helpful in understanding the interplay of external factors (the international and regional political-economic factors) and local factors (political, moral and academic discourses), and their impact on PEJW’s lives. The advantage of micro-macro composition of structure he argues is that events, which might appear unrelated at the micro-

level, may have a common macro-level cause. The importance of a complex structural composition is its ability to explain the unobservable variable(s) affecting agency-structure, since certain realities cannot be reduced to the micro-level without losing their explanatory content. For Wendt, structure has a “configurational plasticity” (p. 152), and can accommodate either and/or both micro-macro components simultaneously. His theory provides the space for analysing the interaction of micro-macro components of structure with agency.

Giddens (1984) uses the concept of “unintended consequences” resulting from the interaction of agency and structure. He notes that unintended consequences are usually not recognized when they occur. When they feed back into the processual interactive loop of agency-structure interaction they become what he calls “unacknowledged conditions of further action” (p. 5). His work considers how unaccounted factors become hidden players in the agency-structure interaction. I find the notion of unintended consequences useful to explain the indirect impact of international and regional geo-politico-economic instability (globalisation and the Arab-Israeli conflict), via local discourses, on the lives of Jordanian women.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that behaviour is not primarily determined by rules but rather is guided and influenced by “habitus”, a system of dispositions that one socially acquires based on one’s conditions of social existence (i.e. one’s context). One can argue that habitus is an abstract concept to explain individuals’ behaviour in response to their cultural environment. It explains the relationship between agency and structure, and incorporates dispositional with structural concepts<sup>43</sup> (Brubaker 1985). Bourdieu posits a processual relationship between habitus, conditions of existence, and practice, whereby conditions of existence influence habitus, which in turn influence practice, and affect conditions of social existence (Figure 1, Appendix A).

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<sup>43</sup> For a critique on Bourdieu’s concept of habitus see Brubaker (1985); Gole (1996); Jenkins (1992).

Habitus produces and reproduces itself, and different conditions of existence produce different habitus, which in turn affects practice and so on. Habitus guides individual practice and representations (mental images, beliefs, ideologies). Habitus can be thought of as the internalisation of one's culture within one's body, and when internalised and embodied, it becomes part of one's behavioural practice. For example, individuals who share a similar habitus hold their body in a similar way, their concept of space is similar, and they have a propensity to walk and talk in a similar manner. The significance of his work for this study is that individuals, whose habitus predisposes them to believe that honour is important, will act in a manner where they uphold the notion of honour. When the majority of individuals value the disposition of honour over other dispositions, then a collective habitus of honour is generated within the society. Since a high value and importance is placed on honour within society, it acquires "capital", an important social status.<sup>44</sup> Bourdieu (1977) argues that all practice is directed at maximizing one's material or symbolic profit (perceived social worth). Thus, honour becomes a source of power: symbolic capital. Bourdieu argues that over time, individuals forget that habitus is socially constructed and begin to perceive it as the natural order. It is legitimised, taken for granted by society and naturalized. When habitus is no longer disputed, rendered immutable, almost sacrosanct, it is transformed into "doxa." Bourdieu's notion of doxa is his way of understanding the social order and of linking the individual to the collective, shifting his theory from the micro to the macro level. Bourdieu explains how social crises can occur in society. If the general population whose dominant discourse – "orthodoxy" - of honour is

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<sup>44</sup> Capital is what individuals acquire through their habitus. It is accumulated and can be converted from one form of capital to another. It can be thought of as one's assets: both the material and non-material. The more capital an individual has, the more power s/he accrues. One's social status, family name and reputation serve as one's social capital. Bourdieu notes that one's good reputation can serve as future 'credit' and/or 'capital for trust', whereby individuals can strike an economic bargain using their name rather than money as collateral, as well as call on people to help in time of need. Implying that one's reputation takes on a value that is over and beyond its actual use (Brubaker 1985).

challenged by other less dominant group(s) or “heterodoxy”, social crises ensue, because the doxic value of honour is questioned, revealing its arbitrary nature.

The importance of Bourdieu’s theory of practice is that it underscores the fact that both women and men are victims of their own creation, their creation of honour as doxa. His theory allows us to move away from the reductionist position of women as the victims of men. Bourdieu’s theory allows social scientists to see the complex nature of social life where both men and women are complicit in creating their own victimization. What is implied is that every individual is both dominated and dominant.

Connell's (1987) work examines in more detail the complex reality of gender relations within a theory of practice. His work is a watershed since he moves away from the concept of patriarchy as the explanation of women's subordination and proposes an alternative viewpoint, avoiding the term patriarchy. To him any theory that advocates a unilateral mode of domination of one category (males) over another category (females) over-generalizes and is flawed. He is critical of the concept of patriarchy and sexual politics as systems to explain all gender inequalities, since in his opinion they can only explain a part of the existing inequalities. He distinguishes between gender relations on a societal level (macro-level) from those on a personal level (a micro-level), which includes home or work. To him the gender arrangements on the personal level (gender regime) are linked in a fundamental and constitutive way to those social arrangements on the collective level (gender order). I will substitute the term gender-power-dynamics (GPD) for gender regime and gender order. I consider GPD a descriptive term of the continual shifting and contestation in power relations.



Connell identifies a “hegemonic masculinity” (male ascendancy), which overemphasizes male prowess and accentuates femininity. By hegemonic masculinity he means institutionalised practices - a “collective strategy” of male dominance over women, where only one legitimate form of masculinity exists with all other types being considered “effeminate” (p. 183). He stresses the possibility that the patterns of power in micro-situations may differ or even contradict the global pattern of power relations.<sup>45</sup> Connell denies the existence of a hegemonic femininity. What exists is an “emphasized femininity,” a femininity that is related to the cultural and ideological notion of women's compliance and women's demeanour whereby they accentuate their sexuality. All forms of femininity are constructed to be subordinate to men. As an adaptation to men's power, Connell claims that women teach each other the art of emphasized femininity: “compliance, nurturance and empathy” as womanly virtues (p. 188). Connell's theory examines the importance of power relations in social structures, and how actors – “free inventors within limits” - work around the deep-rooted cultural constraints to bring about change (p. 95).

### *Connell's three structures*

Connell argues that the pattern of power relationships between men and women on both micro and macro levels are affected by three structures: structure of division of labour, structure of power, and structure of cathexis (can be thought of as elements of one's emotional life, or the pattern of the emotional relationships). These structures are interlinked, change, transform and reorganise over time, “they are imperfect and always under construction” (p. 116), with overlapping elements. These structures constrain present and future practice in a systematic way,

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<sup>45</sup> The presence of gender relations in institutions brings about certain constructs of femininity and masculinity. These differ from one institution to another with each having its own notion regarding sexual behaviour and sexual character.



specific to each structure. The three structures are more like structuring processes rather than fixed structures, since they fail to point out directly the exact location around which gender power struggles occur. They can be considered critical sites that shape gender relations on both the societal and personal level.

Connell defines the structure of power as (a) an object of practice, how individuals and institutions can exert their authority, control and coercion over others, and (b) as a condition of existence, when a segment of the population has on balance an advantage over another or situations where an inequality of resources in a workplace, a household, or a larger institution favours one group over others. He considers the structure of power as resulting in a set of social relations with range and durability. The power structure includes: hierarchy of the state and business; institutional and interpersonal violence; sexual regulation and its surveillance, and domestic authority and its contestations. Aside from being straightforward, Connell argues that power may be diffuse. He stresses the need to identify those responsible for promoting the practice of power and institutions of power (the centres of power), and notes the influence that of ideologies of gender relations have on the practice of power. Connell identifies a complex of institutions and milieu where men have more power over women. He considers them as “core in the power structure of gender” (p. 109) where men and the authority of masculinity are relatively concentrated. He identifies a core power structure of gender, and diffuse or contested patterns of power at the periphery.

Connell’s structure of division of labour deals with the allocation of work, its nature and organization. It includes: organization of housework and childcare; division between paid and unpaid work; segregation of labour markets (men's jobs vs. women's jobs); discrimination in training and promotion, unequal wages and unequal exchanges.

The structure of cathexis is the emotional dimension to all social relationships. It deals with the way people create emotional links between one another, and the daily practice of their emotional relationships. Connell perceives relationships as emotionally charged. Emotional attachments include various emotions such as hostility, anger, love, affection, and jealousy. Consequently, he considers close relationships as emotionally complex because of the coexistence of conflicting emotions, which can contribute to individuals' state of ambivalence. A major component in cathexis is the element of desire. Connell argues that individuals are socialized to desire certain aspects of emotional-social life. For example, individuals learn to desire a particular type of masculinity or femininity in their future spouse. Automatically two categories are socially constructed, an acceptable category from which to choose one's mate, and a prohibited category. Connell refers to this social patterning of desire as "a joint system of prohibition and incitement" (p. 112).

#### *Deference-Emotion System*

Like Connell, a number of other authors stress the role of emotions in patterning social life. Scheff (1988, 2000) has described a deference-emotion system. Core emotions of pride-shame are the driving forces in this model. Individuals want to be accepted (i.e. rewarded) for their social self-presentation, and fear rejection: the loss of their social bond with others. The fear of losing one's social bond is a continuous preoccupation for individuals, even when alone. Individuals monitor their feelings, especially shame because it implies displeasing others, leading to a loss of their social bonds. Scheff argues that the degree and type of positive or negative deference (being held in high regard or loss of social respect), and its concomitant emotions of pride and shame constitute a subtle and pervasive system of social sanctions,

making the deference-emotion system extremely powerful. It can be considered a sanctioning mechanism.

## STRUCTURING PROCESSES APPROACH

Based on Connell's theory, TW feminist theory and PEJW's biographies, the institutions and milieu that are core in the society I am examining are different than Connell's. The core institutions and milieu in Jordan include religion (official, popularist and political Islam), discourses concerning the future of society and women's position in the future society (political, moral and academic), and kinship relations. Refer to figure 2 (Appendix B). For example, family kinship ties are a key site for the operation of structuring processes of power, a site that encompasses both private and public spheres. Also, a woman's family acts as her facilitating factor since they are her link to the public sphere (Joseph and Slyomovics 2001). Sabbaghi (1997) and El Khairouf (2000) found sometimes male kinsmen provide support as a facilitating factor for professional women. An example of active kinship ties in the public sphere is the practice of *wasta*. Other facets include the local discourses of liberal-secularists, conservatives and Islamists. In the structuring process of the division of labour the critical elements that emerge are individual's socio-religious understanding of *ta'a*, *nushuz*, complementarity and the *hijab*,<sup>46</sup> women's social obligations such as reciprocal visitations, and women's familial duties.

Within the structuring process of cathexis one can locate the "deference-emotion system" (Scheff 1988, 2000), and connectivity (Joseph 1999a). Both are significant to PEJW. Women cannot afford to threaten their social bond or connectivity with their family, since their family is their source of financial, social and emotional security. For example mothers desire to be

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<sup>46</sup> The issue of the *hijab* is complex and has been dealt with extensively by the literature. Refer to Afashar (1999); Badran (1995, 2001); El Guinid (1999); Gole (1996). I will touch on it in chapter four.

perceived as honourable mothers by raising honourable daughters, and women guard their reputation because it reflects on their families' honour. Relationships between family members are charged as each aims to gain their family's approval, protect their self-interests and family reputation. The deference-emotion system and connectivity are significant because in both the complex nature of emotions and the role they play in human relationships are highlighted.

The customised theoretical approach (Figure 3 – Appendix B) takes into account the complex reality of PEJW's lives. It illustrates the complex, fluid, and dynamic relationship between agents and structure, and allows for multiple explanations of practice. The relationship between agency-structure is neither deterministic nor eternally elastic. It is mutually constitutive, implying that the boundaries between agency and structure are unstable and shifting. Agents act and are acted upon by structure, and in the process both are affected. The structural components as well as the interactional process are also affected and transformed within and throughout the interactive process (Wendt 1999). "There are moments of transition, when the conditions of practice alter fast; there are periods of more or less steady shift in a given direction; and there are periods when a particular balance of forces is stabilized" (Connell 1987, 149). The outcomes of individual and social practices are neither predictable nor unpredictable. The process of the interaction is stressed and there is a move away from a simplistic reductionist approach of explaining agentic behaviour.

An emphasis on structuring processes stresses the linkage between the macro and micro structural levels and examines the elements existing within each structural level and how they may be either facilitating or inhibiting factors with regards to PEJW's agentic action. The macro and micro components are linked together, yet can act separately. They reflect one another, and at the same time allow for differences in GPD on both levels. This approach makes it possible to

take into account the impact of international and regional geo-socio-politico-economic forces (GPD on supra macro-level) on the macro level, allowing for example, the examination of the influence of geo-politico-economic forces on the political, moral and academic discourse which in turn impact the structuring processes of power, division of labour, and cathexis. The framework allows for tracing unintended consequences, such as the conservative, liberal-secular and Islamists' reaction to socio-politico-economic changes on the macro and micro level, and how it feeds back into the system as unacknowledged conditions of further action. The structuring processes of cathexis, division of labour and power are culturally specific accounting for the powerful influence of family bonds and Islam. The framework also acknowledges that external forces do impact the dialectical relationship between agency and structure.

## METHODOLOGY

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that explorative studies require a qualitative research methodology. In the section on theoretical approach, I outlined my choice of view about how the social world operates. This theoretical approach fits well with qualitative research. This study is about exploring women's personal experiences, through qualitative research interviews, about how they manage to maintain their honourable status. For the purpose of triangulation (combining several-methods with the aim of viewing data from different angles), I have incorporated face-to-face in-depth interviews, focus groups and time studies.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

Qualitative research interviews are concerned with both events and facts, and the manner in which people construct, interpret and give meaning to their experiences. They attempt "to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's

experiences, [and] to uncover their lived world” (Kvale 1996, 1). It allows for the reconstruction of events in which the researcher was absent (Rubin and Rubin 1995). There are a various forms of interviews and a multiplicity of usages (Fontana and Frey 1998). I have chosen two forms: individual, face-to-face interviewing and face-to-face group interviewing. The individual interviews were semi-structured; whereas the group interviews were unstructured. I mostly relied on repeated in-depth individual interviewing using a combination of two styles: topical and cultural. Topical interviews focus on explanations of particular events and descriptions of process, using a select group of subjects. The researcher is interested in detailed information, and questions are more focused. Cultural style interviews involve re-interviewing the same participants over time with the aim of pursuing emergent themes in greater deal. Cultural interviews are less structured, and explore the shared meanings and understandings among the group members being questioned. The interest is on norms, values and taken-for-granted rules of behaviour in society. Mixing the two styles enables the researcher to alternate between “listening for nuanced cultural meanings and asking about events” (Rubin and Rubin 1995, 31). Individual interviewing is considered the most suitable research method to investigate women’s agentic action as they interact with social structures. It enables the researcher to examine women’s response to their social circumstances (Gerson and Horowitz 2002). I included group interviews because the interaction of the group members and the group dynamics generates a different perspective on issues that are discussed.

### *Individual interviews*

Qualitative interviewing is a conversation with purpose; it is a philosophy, argue Rubin and Rubin (1995), an approach to learning, consisting of three philosophical components. Firstly, through the stories participants share, an understanding of their experiences is achieved.

Secondly, through the process of interviewing, a relationship is established between the participant and researcher that impose a set of obligations on both parties. Thirdly, all through the interview an ethical approach is defined, which guides the interview process: the content, flow, and choice of topics, allowing for the humanity of the interviewing relationship.<sup>47</sup>

Interviews are “interactional events”, and involve the active participation of both the interviewee and interviewer. Both converse about themes of mutual interest and are involved in “meaning-making work” (Hollstein and Gubrium 1995, 2). They are considered “negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place” (Fontana and Frey 2000, 663). Interviews have a dual aspect, the personal interrelation and the knowledge constructed through the interaction between participant and interviewer (Kvale 1996). Methodologically interview responses are considered actively constructed narratives. Participants’ stories are treated as their accounts of how they perceive and construct their world (Silverman 2001).

As a feminist researcher I am expected to promote a sociology *for* PEJW (Oakley 1981; Smith 1987), a sociology, which treats PEJW as subjects, and speaks of their daily lives from their perspective. My underlying epistemological approach is based on the fact that data are produced and not collected (May 2002, 1). I consider interviews as a “site of knowledge construction” and both interviewer and participant are co-participants in the process (Mason 2002, 227).

Feminist researchers urge interviewers to be sensitive to the stories participants tell them, the way they are told, and the vulnerability of the participants when they open up and share sensitive

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<sup>47</sup> The set of obligations and ethical approach will be discussed in the section “ethical considerations.”

information about their lives.<sup>48</sup> Because of the sensitive nature of some of the topics, I acted proactively, prepared a list of counsellors and took it along with me. If the situation called for me to share the list with the participants I felt ready. Reger (2001) notes the importance of acknowledging a researcher's subjectivity and emotions. I was affected by the participant's painful accounts, especially when they broke down and cried during the interviews, consequently, I sought counselling when I felt emotionally drained.

### *Group interviews*

I rely on Morgan's (1997, 6) definition of focus groups "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic." Focus groups are considered to be synonymous with group interviews. In market research studies, focus groups are usually composed of five to ten participants, guided by a skilled interviewer (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). In sociological studies, the group tends to be smaller ranging from three to six participants (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). Focus groups serve multiple purposes (Fern 2001). For the purposes of this study, the task of the focus group was exploratory: to uncover PEJW's practices and experiences within their work and home setting.

Focus groups are an excellent way to give voice to, and allow women, to hear women's multiple experiences (Madriz 2000). Group work takes place during all the focus interviews (Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1997). A positive aspect includes being stimulating, suitable when understanding and insight are required and when there is a need to explore social issues (Morgan 1997). Focus

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<sup>48</sup> Refer to Belenky, Clinchy et al. (1986); Cotterill (1992); Finch (1993); Fontana and Frey (1994, 1998, 2000); Ling (1992); Linton (1992); Narayan (1992), Oakley (1981); Olesen (1994, 1998, 2000); Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002); Ribens and Edwards (1998); Rosie (1993); Smith (1987, 1994); Wolf (1996a, 1996b).



groups can have an empowering effect, in line with feminist theories, when they validate women's voices and experiences (Kemmis and Mc Taggart 2000).

A major challenge with focus groups is the issue of confidentiality. There is no guarantee that participants will not gossip about each other (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). Another challenge includes the unpredictability of the research process: the issues being uncovered, group dynamics, and absence of some participants due to time constraints (Krueger 1998). Other difficulties revolve around managing the situation of participants with controlling or challenging behaviour, and encouraging reluctant participants to voice their opinion.<sup>49</sup>

## TIME STUDIES

Time study is a time log of daily activities and examines the amount of effort and time women exert in their functions (Coltrane 1998; Sen 1990). My initial intention was to ask participants to keep a 24-hour detailed diary of time spent on the various activities they partook during a typical weekday. The purpose was to delineate and document each participant's paid and unpaid work. I abandoned the idea halfway through the fieldwork because PEJW did not keep records: their reasons were that they were overburdened with familial and social obligations, and did not have time.

## METHODS

Proponents of qualitative research suggest that good practice involves accounting for how the research was conducted (reliability) and explaining how the data was interpreted and how conclusions were reached at during the analysis (validity). The intent is to make the process

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<sup>49</sup> For a detailed discussion regarding the challenges see Fern (2001); Kruger (1994); Morgan (1997).

transparent (Holliday 2002; Silverman 2000). This section is about how I conducted my research. This involves talking about my sample, interview guide, and ethical considerations.

## SAMPLE

I generated my sample using a snowballing technique. Snowballing is a purposeful sample (Morse 1994), an effective way to “build an exhaustive sampling frame”, recommended for small studies, and difficult to find populations (Bernard 1994, 97). I contacted single and married PEJW I knew, and with their help I generated my sample. My sample included two main groups: PEJW western and non-western educated, and expert informants. I interviewed 20 expert informants among them were Princess ‘Aisha, who established the Directorate For Women’s Affairs in the Jordanian military service, Taghrid Hikamt the first female judge in Jordan, and Nawal Fa’uri the first Islamist female to become a member of the shura council of the IAF.<sup>50</sup> The total number of PEJW was 54. Twenty-three of them were single (SPEJW) and 31 were married (MPEJW). Of the SPEJW, 12 were western educated, studied in Western Europe and North America and 11 were locally educated, studied in Jordan or other countries in the Arab world (mainly Egypt, Syria and Kuwait). Of western SPEJW, three were Christians and nine were Muslim with no veiled women.<sup>51</sup> Of the locally educated SPEJW three were Christian, nine were Muslim and four of them were veiled. Sixteen of the MPEJW were western educated. Seven were Christian, nine were Muslim and two of them were veiled. The remaining 15 were locally educated. Two were Christians and 13 were Muslims with only one veiled. They ranged between 24 and 55 years of age. I am uncertain about the number of women who are of East bank Jordanian origin or of Palestinian origin: this was too sensitive a question to ask.

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<sup>50</sup> Mrs. Fa’uri was elected in the early to mid 1990s. She is considered to be a progressive Islamist activist and has written and lectured about the position of women in Islam in Jordan and other Arab countries.

<sup>51</sup> By veil I mean they wear the *hijab*, the headscarf.



To explain why I chose to focus on single and married, western and non-western educated elite professional I need to return to my original research design. Initially I wanted to find out if there were differences between western and non-western single and married educated women, and if exposure to Western culture provided western educated women with extended options. My interest was in ascertaining the extent to which exposure to western education and life style influenced the women's lives personally and professionally. Hence, it was essential to compare the different groups (Silverman 1993). The reason I focused on professional elite women is related to the fact that they made a deliberate choice to resist cultural norms by insisting on establishing a professional career for themselves. They were women who had already transgressed the socio-cultural norms by entering into public space, an exclusive male terrain. The initial research design was action oriented, incorporating focus groups and in-depth interviews. A select number of participants, who made up the focus groups, were to collaborate with the researcher through out the span of the research. These participants were supposed to be involved in conducting some of the research and analysis. The intent was to have an interactive approach, with participants having control over the research agenda and process, giving them a voice.

I based my original research design on a preliminary focus group I conducted prior to undertaking my research. The focus group included professional elite single, married, divorced and widowed Jordanian women. The group informed me that divorced and widowed PEJW were few in number. I feared I would not find an adequate number of them for my sample. For pragmatic reasons, I deleted them from the study. During the focus group married women claimed that single women had easier lives because they were not saddled with social obligations such as reciprocal visits. They maintained that single women were happy and care free. Single women felt they would gain more personal freedom upon marriage, because they would only be

accountable to their husbands instead of their fathers, brothers and male kin. They also did not empathise with married women's struggles, and wondered why educated elite professional married women would "put up" with their husbands' demands. From the discussion it became obvious that married and single women had preconceived misconceptions about their counterparts' lives. Given the gap in the literature about their lives, I decided to focus on both married and single PEJW. To narrow the time band, I chose western educated women who studied in the West (North America and Western Europe) from 1988-1998. Within my research sample, eight of the married women I interviewed graduated before 1988. Four were western educated and the other four were locally educated. Their stories were not significantly different, so I decided to keep them in the study. Surprisingly no difference emerged between the western educated women and non-western educated women. For this reason I merged the four groups into two: single and married women.

#### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations span a wide range, such as protecting participants from being manipulated during the research process, the way the data is generated, and how it is reported, and the voice researchers give the participants. There are political implications to defining and documenting information (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002; Olesen 2000). What is at stake are the consequences the research will have on each participant, and all the participants as a collective (see chapter one, academic discourse). I have tried to allow the women to speak for themselves. I did this through sharing excerpts of their interviews in chapters three and four. I also tried to avoid portraying PEJW as a monolithic group. I provided a range of stories to show the diversity among the participants and their nuance experiences. Since I wrote this summation I take responsibility for the outcome.

Prior to any interview I obtained each participant's informed verbal consent. I met each participant either in her home, office or in my home for coffee. I explained to her the aim and purpose of the study. I stated "The purpose of my study is to learn how Jordanian professional women assert themselves in their private and public lives. I will be interviewing both single and married women western and non-western educated, who graduated between 1988-1998. I will conduct several in-depth interviews and ask you to participate in a group meeting. The interviews will range between one to two hours. Since my research is qualitative, I will need to conduct a minimum of two interviews. Your answers are strictly confidential. For research purposes and confidentiality, I ask you to give me a pseudo-name and if necessary a psuedo-profession. I will leave the location and time of the interview up to your discretion. To ensure for privacy and confidentiality, it is preferable to have it in a quiet area away from people's intrusions. The questions will be about your educational background, family background, your relationship with your family members, and/or husband, how you manage your household responsibilities, familial and work responsibilities, and your challenges as a professional woman. I also have questions about intimate aspects of your personal life and your thoughts about how you perceive yourself and other female public figures. For accuracy of information, I would like to tape-record our interview but only if this is acceptable to you. You have the right at any time to shut off the recorder or refuse to answer any question you deem inappropriate. If you would like a copy of our interview, I will be more than happy to provide you with one. The tapes will be in my possession, and I will be transcribing the interviews." I encouraged each participant to ask me questions and voice her concerns. I shared with them the reasons that motivated me to do the study (see introduction). I realized that participants were more concerned with the type of person I was (my family background), than with the research topic. I capitalized on my absence from the culture for 15 years and presented myself as "learner" giving myself the opportunity to ask participants what they meant without being considered imprudent and rude, especially with

participants who tended to speak classical Arabic instead of colloquial Arabic, such as female Islamists. If the participants agreed to be interviewed, we exchanged telephone numbers. Usually this introductory meeting ranged between one to two hours, and enabled us to build a rapport. I called them a week later and asked them if they still were interested in participating and then we set up a time for our interview.

## RESEARCHER'S POSITIONING

As a *halfie*<sup>52</sup> I was well situated to embark on this research. I consider myself an insider and outsider simultaneously (Abu-Lughod 1991). My multiple positions<sup>53</sup> gave me an advantage in uncovering the cultural constraints on women's lives, yet as Altorki and El-Solh (1988a) caution, my positioning was not unproblematic. There were some participants who were sceptical of my motives, especially conservative Islamists who feared I would misrepresent them and stereotype them as fundamentalists. A few perceived me as western because of my fair complexion and body language. Although all the women initially agreed to participate in my research, I was surprised when a few initially resisted answering my questions with regards to their personal relationship with their parents and/or spouse. Perhaps their initial reluctance to divulge information, especially intimate family details, has to do with the cultural emphasis on loyalty to the family's name and honour, and the "cultural imperative to paint a rosy picture" of the family one belongs to (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993, 57). To outsiders the family must always appear as a cohesive family unit (Altorki 1989; Kavar 1997). I found myself sharing my

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<sup>52</sup> A *halfie* is a term coined by Abu Lughod (1991), implying a person of mixed heritage.

<sup>53</sup> As a Jordanian-American Christian woman, raised in Jerusalem (1964-1977), who had obtained her undergraduate and graduate degree in the US and was married to a Muslim at the time, I felt that my experience gave me an advantage: an ability to empathise with the various women I interviewed. My return to Jordan in 1992 gave me the opportunity to forge a better understanding of Jordan, since I never lived there in my youth and young adulthood. My similar academic experience and social class with half of the participants in my research was an asset.

own personal life history with almost every participant before they agreed to open up. I presume the women felt safer after learning about my personal life.

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

The questionnaire was my guide during my field interviews (refer to Appendix C and D). It was a flexible tool enabling me to ask women questions about their personal family life and professional life. Since my research was exploratory in nature, and I was interested in events and processes, I relied on a semi-structured interview guide (Gerson and Horowitz 2002). It gave me the advantage of asking all participants similar general questions and allowed me to be flexible and sensitive to their context (Mason 2002), altering sometimes the sequences of questions, asking for further clarification, reflecting with the participants on issues that were of importance to them, and following up on unanticipated leads from the participants (Slim, Thompson et al. 1998; Kvale 1996). The order of the questions was altered sometimes, to suit the participant's needs at the time of the interview and to adapt some of the questions accordingly as well as allow me to probe for further clarification.

The semi-structured interview guide focused on the following: women's educational background; family background; relationship with parents and siblings; household responsibilities; family obligations; professional career; resource management, and sense of self. For single women I asked them additional questions regarding their status as single women and about their intimate life. For married women I focused on their conjugal relationship and childcare responsibilities. Because women talked a great deal about their reputation, I added an

additional question “what does it [your reputation] mean to you?”<sup>54</sup> And when I realised that single women expected that they would eventually marry, I asked them “what do you think your life would be like, if you reach 40 and you are still not married?” I averaged about 3 in-depth interviews with each participant, each lasting about 2 hours. For some women who had tight schedules, I had five or six interviews that lasted 50 minutes. Since women had complete control over the tape recorder, I made brief notes. Once the interview was over, I would sit quietly in my car, and write extensive field notes, which included my impressions, thoughts and feelings about the interview process; women’s nonverbal responses, and their reaction to my questions. If they turned off the tape recorder I would note the reasons and what they said. If their husbands or children interrupted the interview, I described the interaction. I also noted women’s style of clothes. I was very attentive to women’s body language. My nursing skills proved invaluable. When I noted a participant became distressed, angry or in pain, I would acknowledge her feelings. It was not uncommon for women at that point to break down and cry. There were times when we stopped the interview and rescheduled it for another time.

As for the focus groups, I initially devised an interview guide, but abandoned its use once the group met, because their concerns guided the direction of the discussion. I conducted a total of six group interviews, three for SPEJW and three for MPEJW. The members of the focus groups for MPEJW differed in each group. With regards to MPEJW, the discussion of the first focus centred on love and rational marriage. The discussion in the second group was about discrimination at work among women who wore the *hijab*, and the third focus group was about discrimination at work because of their gender.

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<sup>54</sup> I would ask this question when they mentioned the importance of their reputation. If women did not mention it, I would say “most of the women mentioned that having a good reputation is important to them” and then I would wait for their reaction.



The group members of SPEJW were consistent, partly because it was in line with my initial research design and because the single women had more control over their time. They used the focus group as a discussion group to learn more about what the other members' experience was like. The group discussion allowed the women to find out that they had many issues in common, thus it was empowering experience for them. The forum was used to make the personal political. The issues single women focused on were: their struggle to fit into society; their ability to exercise their agency at home, and their frustration about not being taken seriously at work and perceived as incompetent by virtue of their gender.

#### LANGUAGE, CODE SWITCHING, AND TRANSCRIBING

The majority of women spoke in colloquial Arabic, with the exception of Islamists who alternated between classical and colloquial Arabic. The issue of language in my study is a contested issue because Arabic is the mother tongue of all the participants, yet because of their education in private schools,<sup>55</sup> most alternated between Arabic and English (also known as code switching), and used English to express their professional ideas. Code switching is very common among professionals. I noted in my transcription every time women switched codes, to ascertain if a pattern emerged and whether it had any significance. The process was cumbersome, and I was not able to discern a pattern.<sup>56</sup> Another issue was the language in which the interviews were conducted. Before interviewing I asked each participant the language she preferred me to use in the interview (Arabic or English), with the exception of Islamists. Interestingly, even when they

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<sup>55</sup> The majority of women I interviewed studied in private schools. Most of these schools teach a substantial number of their courses in the English language.

<sup>56</sup> I found code switching very frustrating during while transcribing because there were times that I had not realised that the participants had switched codes. I found myself unable to understand what the women were saying. I then started to realise that when I was lost, the participant had switched codes and I was not anticipating that.

specified one, they would start switching codes. For example, at the start of my interview with Faizeh, I wanted to make sure she knew how to shut off the taper recorder. I asked her in Arabic,

L: Do you know how to turn it [tape recorder] off?

F: [English] Yeah - okay. [Switched to Arabic] I was talking about [Switched to English] happiness. [Switched to Arabic] That - *ya'ni* (I mean) – [Switched to English] it's - I'm realizing more and more [Switched to Arabic] that it's [Switched to English] it's so elusive. [Switched to Arabic] Because - [Switched to English] it's so fleeting [Switched to Arabic] like, not - *ya'ni* [Switched to English] I look back and I think of the times when I was actually, truly, truly happy – [Switched to Arabic] and I find that [Switched to English] you know, very few moments in my life where I was actually - *ya'ni* – happy. [Switched to Arabic] And [Switched to English] only for specific time periods, very short ones. And as time goes by – I realize [Switched to Arabic] that - *ya'ni* as if there - there is a [Switched to English] threat to ever achieving that sort of feeling [Switched to Arabic] which is [Switched to English] complete happiness [Switched to Arabic] and...

Because women switched codes frequently, I opted not to indicate the point at which they switched codes, when using their quotes to illustrate a point. I felt including them was distracting to the reader.

Tierney (2000) notes that translation is always provisional. I did not adopt a literal translation. Rather I used a target text oriented translation that ensures an acceptable translated text. I transcribed all my interviews in English, because of the frequency of code switching. I converted the spoken Arabic language (source) into the English language (target). Using a literal translation defies the conventions of English because English and Arabic are linguistically and culturally very distant (Newmark 1988; Toury 1995).

## ANALYSIS

Analysis is not an isolated stage; rather it permeates the entire research process. When I set off to conduct my research my initial question was: How do elite professional Jordanian (EPJW) women exercise their agency as they traverse between home and work? This meant asking three sub-questions: (1) what are women's agentic actions given their structural constraints? (2) What strategies do they use? And (3) what are their facilitating and constraining factors at home and work? As my research work progressed, patterns and themes emerged and my research question became more focused. In this section, I will discuss my analytical process.

I relied on the texts of my transcriptions from my in-depth interviews and focus groups for my data analysis. I used my typed field notes when participants stopped the tape recorder to note the questions participants objected to answering with the tape recorder on. While transcribing I scribbled down themes that emerged and words frequently used by participants. I chose a consistent system of coding my data set using computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data (CAQDAS), Ethnograph. Since my goal was to understand women's perception of their situation, the choices they felt they had and the actions they made, I incorporated several of the techniques suggested by Kvale (1996); Mason (1996); Miles and Huberman (1994a, 1994b). Their techniques allowed for a detailed examination of social processes within units of my data set.

## DATA CODING

Using Ethnograph I assigned my data several codes. The first level codes I assigned my data were family life (FL), personal life (PL), work life (WL) and other (O). Then, I progressed to my second level codes. For family life, I assigned the data the following codes: for single women I

assigned the data the code (FLF) when examining their relationship with their father, I assigned the code (FLM) when examining their relationship with their mother, (FLB) with their brother, (FLS) with sister and (FLB) with boyfriend respectively. In the case of married women I added the code (FLH) when examining their relationship with their husband, (FLI) when examining their relationship with their in-laws, (FLSO) with their sons, and (FLD) with their daughters.

With regards to personal life I included the codes (PLD) for decision making, (PLM) for mobility and (PLS) for sexuality. Under work life I assigned the code (WLC) for their relationship with their colleagues, (WLB) for their relationship with their boss or if self employed I assigned the data the code (WLAB) to examine women's challenges as being a boss, and (WLP) for their professional challenges. In the area of Other, I examined participants' positive and negative views about the women's movement and assigned that data the code (OWM), and when examining participants' views about Toujan Faisal, I assigned the data the code (OT). Upon completion of my second level codes, I assigned my data a third level codes. At this juncture, I looked for the facilitating (f) and constricting (c) factors in each category of women's family life and work life. Under the section of personal life, I examined their decision-making in more detail with regard to handling of their income (PLDI), household chores (PLDHH), and for married women I examined their childcare arrangements with their spouse (PLDCC).

## DECIPHERING THE OUTCOMES

I read my data on four levels. The first reading was a *literal reading*, focusing on the words women used to describe their actions, the women's account of their observations and experiences, and the actions they took. The second level reading was an *interpretive reading*,

which entailed constructing and documenting what I thought the data meant and what I could infer from it (Mason 1996). The third level reading was a *symptomatic reading*, which examined women's, own "relationship to the phenomena they describe[d]" (Kvale 1996). Here, the emphasis was on how women experience their situation and subjectivity. For example, I posed these questions to the text "do women consider their experience a source of conflict or tension?" Or "are they reluctant to discuss this issue and are trying to circumvent the topic?" The fourth reading was, a *reflexive reading*. At this level I explored my role in the process of data generation and interpretation. Moving through the reading levels sharpened my reflexivity and provided me several interpretations.

From the literal reading I noted that both single and married women repeatedly used the words reputation, gossip, family honour and family connections. They mentioned, "protecting their reputation from gossip", the importance of both "maintaining" and "fulfilling their social obligations", and the notion of "complementarity" between men and women. The level of importance each woman attached to these notions varied. Single women stressed their "need to fit", and "inability to breathe." With regard to their professional career, women said they "worked twice as hard as men" and "were overlooked in terms of job promotions." Women referred to sexual matters as "it."

The interpretive reading revealed that women were worried about their family and personal reputation, the degree of their concern for their reputation differed among the women, and that different types of relationships existed between women and their individual family members. Not only did family connections play a central role in their lives, but also they stressed their need to have their family's approval. Women's concern about reputation varied in intensity ranging from a consuming obsession to being careful in their actions. In their professional careers,

women revealed their desire to be perceived and treated as capable professionals. Women's reference to sex as "it" implied the subject was taboo.

The symptomatic reading showed that women felt imprisoned by their need to safeguard their reputation and maintain their family connections. They were frustrated with double standards and discrimination at work. As for sexual matters, women felt embarrassed to talk about it, some were reluctant to share their experience, and shut down the conversation by stating, "this is a very personal matter", illustrating their discomfort about discussing the matter.

Through the reflexive reading I noted a general discomfort among women regarding sexual matters. Consequently, I tried to assess, in a sensitive manner, how comfortable women were about their sexuality. I avoided asking direct questions, and started off by asking women to recall their first menstrual experience. In the case of married women, I asked them if their mothers gave them any advice about marital life, and then asked them if their mother prepared them for their wedding night. This allowed me to find out about their sexual life and experience. With single women, I asked them whether they dated. If during the process they voluntarily talked about kissing, I would try to find out more about their sexual life. Since the nature of interviews is conversational, and I chose a semi-structured interview guide, I carefully guided the conversation into sexual matters. Some women shared their intimate experiences, while others circumvented the issue. I took the latter's behaviour to indicate their refusal in sharing information. The way the issue of sexuality was addressed differed from one participant to another. I was aware that my level of comfort differed depending on the participant's response, which was not the case when we talked about the other sections in the interview guide.

## ITERATIVE CYCLE

From the readings two main themes emerged: women were concerned about their reputation, and women acted strategically to maintain their reputation. I wondered whether there was a connection between a woman's concern for her reputation and the type of relationship she had with her family, wanted to know, to what extent her agentic action was influenced by both her concern for her reputation and the type of relationship she had with her family. So I went back and explored the relationship between the facilitating and restricting codes for each woman and her relationship with each of her family members. I noted a range of different relationships between each woman and her family members. Based on women's accounts, each member of her family differed with regards to what they considered to be her honourable behaviour. Accordingly, I revised my research question: "How do women manage the conventions of being an honourable woman as they navigate between their work and home environments?"

To find out more about the differences in women's relationships with their families, I mapped out each woman's relationship with every member of her conjugal and/or natal family. I created a family profile for each woman. On a behavioural level, I listed a father's supportive and non-supportive acts towards his daughter. I repeated the task with each of her family members. On a level of family dynamics, I noted how every woman described the interaction between her family members and their reactions to her decision-making process and plans of action. I clustered cases with similar profiles into groups. I classified each group and labelled it. Within each group I mapped out the general practices of the members and relationship dynamics according to the women's accounts. In this step I subsumed the similar case profiles into one category and identified the type of relationship that existed. I applied this technique of mapping to each respondent with respect to their marital relationships, relationship with their offspring,

decision to veil, work experience, and their views about Toujan Faisal and the women's movement.

To understand participants' decision-making and action, I used the structuring processing theoretical approach as my guide. I examined the impact of the structuring processes of cathexis, power, division of labour, on women's agentic action, paying close attention to the influence of religion, kinship ties and discourses on the structuring processes. What emerged are women's strategic actions such as discrete compliance and *fait accompli*. I will discuss these in greater detail in chapters three and four.

## CONCLUSION

The advantage of using Bourdieu and Connell's work is the processual nature of their theories. Their work allows for examining the dialectical relationship between agency and structure. I found both Bourdieu and Connell's significant. Bourdieu's theory is helpful in explaining why honour is important, as well as individuals' seeming obsession with their reputation (since honour being measured in terms of reputation), and women's complicity in their own victimisation. His work allows us to see how the notion of honour guides, determines and influences both the individual and collective practice. Connell's work is invaluable because it moves away from the notion of patriarchy and examines the power centres in structure that influence GPD on individual and societal levels.

Since the work of the aforementioned theorists could not explain the realities of PEJW's lives, I adapted their concepts, and came up with a customised theoretical approach. A major limitation to my study is that it reflects the view and reality of a particular group within Jordanian society, hence is not generalisable. What I present is a plausible account that relies as much as possible



on the evidence, experience, and description of actions that the participants provided. By not adding men to the research, our knowledge is limited to women. Including men might be very useful to aid in our understanding of the dynamics of social interaction between the genders, and the strategies men and the “ruling social structures” employ to maintain their power. Feminist theory does not preclude research on men; rather it encourages it (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Faced with financial and temporal restraints, I decided to focus only on women, an unavoidable compromise. In the next chapters I will show how PEJW's positioning, identity and agentic action shift according to the social structures they are embedded in and interact with.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SINGLEHOOD: REVERBERATING BETWEEN FRUSTRATION, RESILIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

When you come up with your own – code of honour, ... people find that very frightening – because it's very hard to be anyway an individual – in our society. So when you come up and tell people, for example “I want to live my life this way” – or you tell a man ‘I don't accept the way you treat me this way’ ... they get shocked! They get really shocked. They just look at you and you know - like you're supposed to be timid or shy – or you're not supposed to talk about things like that. You're not supposed to come and tell someone that this is the way I am – this is the way I think and I don't like you invading it – or damaging it (Ruba).

A recent article in the Arabic daily press Al-Arab Alyaum dated 23/7/2002, entitled “A social catastrophe concerning young males and females: the rise in spinsterhood in Jordan”, depicted the alarm among Jordanian social scientists, regarding this new phenomenon. The article attempted to uncover the reasons for the rise in singlehood.<sup>57</sup> Kavar (1997) was the first social scientist to alert Jordanians to the emergence of a new social category of single Jordanian women, whom she called *adult working daughters*.

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<sup>57</sup> The article stresses that the main cause of spinsterhood has to do with young women's education. supposedly educated women no longer have high regard for local social customs. Furthermore, the article notes that single educated women assert their personality, which young men find unacceptable. There is a belief among some Jordanian men that women who interact with young men in the university are not only loose, but do not respect the sacred bonds of marriage.

What does it mean to be a single Jordanian woman in a society that perceives marriage as “a rite of passage from daughterhood to adulthood” (Gordon 1994, 98), where single women are considered both incomplete, minors and invisible (Vom Bruck 1997) because they failed to reach the natural state of womanhood that can only be achieved through marriage (Jowkar 1986)? The single women I interviewed had three main questions on their mind: “Who am I?” “Where do I belong?” And “Do I fit here?” Because they expect to shape their own lives by their own efforts, their singlehood is rife with challenges as they assert themselves, struggle for their independence and search for their identity. They walk a tight rope in their attempt to maintain their personal autonomy and connectivity with their family. Sa’ar (2001) studied single Palestinian women and noted that these women had to maintain a fine balance between not appearing overly powerful or weak, and were expected to uphold the family honour through their proper behaviour (not appearing sexually available nor unfeminine), if they were to continue receiving their families’ support and protection. How do single women fit into the so-called “traditional code of femininity” while maintaining their honourable social status? Are they marginalized? What possibilities and limitations do they experience in organizing their lives? What are their spaces for autonomy and independence? What factors influence their decision-making and choices? And, what are their conceptions of self as single women? These are the questions that I explore in this chapter.

By examining single women’s lives, I will illustrate their understanding of what it means to be a female, a woman and honourable. I argue that these women engage in a “double resistance” (Abu-Lughod 1990, 52) when they fight their parents (especially their mothers) and the gendered honour code of society as they develop a wide range of rules of modesty in their attempt to uphold their honourable status. Given that the notion of family honour - *‘ird* - is intransigent

(Abu Odeh 1996), this chapter will focus on single women's levels of resistance and unravel the hidden power structures they face while defining their honourability.

## SINGLE WOMEN BY CHOICE OR HAPPENSTANCE?

As Gordon (1994, 63) says, "Singlehood is a result of a complex interaction between structural, cultural and biographical aspects." Women do not choose singlehood, rather as Gordon argues, they float into it as a result of decisions they took at various periods of their lives, such as rejecting particular marriage offers, maintaining their standard of living, or furthering their careers. Like the single women in Gordon's study and Davis (1993), the single women I interviewed remained unmarried because of their inability to find suitable partners. When asked if they were single by choice or chance, the majority answered it was by chance. However, upon carefully analysing the data, it was apparent they refused many suitors because (a) the suitors lacked necessary characteristics and qualifications; (b) they wanted a man to whom they could relate; (c) a partner who could appreciate their value; and (d) a man who would not restrict their freedom in term of future education, work and travel.

Jordanian single women pay a high price for having standards regarding their future spouse. Unable to find a suitable partner, they have remained single in a couple-oriented and family-oriented society. Having reached their late 20s or early 30s, these single women had little prospect of marriage. Ironically, all the women still believe that they might get married, even though they were critical of marriage. As they are into their early 30s, they are experiencing social pressures from their family and society to marry. The pressures come in various forms, such as expressions of pity: "Oh, you poor thing you haven't gotten married yet!" or statements implying that they were defective: "I wonder if there is something wrong with her?"

Sometimes the questions were subtle. People might ask, “Isn’t it time for you to get married?” Christian and Muslim women experienced the same social pressures. The women said that their families understood that they hadn’t found a suitable partner when they were refusing suitors in their early to mid-20s. As they were entering their 30s, their parents are pressuring them to marry. For example, Muna, a young Christian woman, was getting “the silent treatment” and hearing curt remarks from her parents because she refused to accept her first cousin’s marriage proposal.

## CAUSES OF SINGLEHOOD

From my data, women’s singlehood status could be attributed to two main causes. Firstly, women made generalisations about men. They referred to the Arab man as a *rajul sharqi* (eastern man) who was not capable of being open-minded, even if western educated. What these women have discovered is that although these men have lived abroad, and had to cook and clean, they expected their future wives to wait on them. They claimed that regardless of men’s exposure to western life, their cultural socialization in strict gender roles remained deeply rooted. Secondly, single women feared the eastern man, with his image as all controlling, expecting total obedience from a wife, with relentless demands, insistence on cooked meals, a clean house, and expecting a wife to fulfil all social obligations. They perceived the eastern man as forcing them to give up their sense of self or pressuring them to put their lives on hold. They constructed the eastern man as domineering and controlling, an unflattering stereotype. Maraya captured women’s sentiments with this quote:

I don’t think a lot of men want to go for it [an assertive woman] especially Arab men. They want one who is cultured enough to speak in public – [who] is submissive enough to play the role - being loving, to prepare the food and he is the one who shows

[is the star figure] - and she is the one who complements him. In the sense that she is cultured, pretty, well dressed, speaks well in public. But when it gets to the point that she is going to take over a little bit or not really taking over but asserting herself, it scares him I think (Maraya).

Most of the single women shared similar sentiments to Maraya. Through their interaction with Jordanian men, they noted that most, including western educated Jordanian men, want to marry younger women who are socially and sexually inexperienced.

## FAMILY AND PERSONAL LIFE

### ADULT SINGLE DAUGHTERS AND THEIR PARENTS:

#### ADJUSTING THEIR ROLE EXPECTATIONS

Culturally, young women are expected to marry by the age of 26. Reaching their late 20s, unmarried, mid - to late 30s, and even early 40s has created a strain on their relationship with their parents. Single adult daughters and parents have to adjust to the idea that both still live together. Neither is prepared for this new social situation, and both lack the tools to deal with their predicament. Moreover, when single women assert themselves, they bring questions of power and female agency into the dynamics of their familial relationship. In the process of asserting their independence, single adult daughters experience varying responses from members of their family, ranging from subtle resistance to threats on their life. As Gordon (1994) asserts, single women's journey is fraught with tension and contradiction.

Many women wished that their parents understood them. Some mentioned they lacked emotional support from their family, especially from their mothers.<sup>58</sup> Single women were quick to point out

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<sup>58</sup> I will elaborate on this later in this chapter.

that the rapid pace of urbanization and development that Jordan had witnessed in the past 50 years contributed to the tensions between them and their parents. Their diverging value systems created a cultural gap, especially with regard to single women's practices that challenged their parents' socio-cultural beliefs.<sup>59</sup>

The single women in this research differed in their family backgrounds. Some described themselves as having strong tribal backgrounds, their families still adhering to customary tribal traditions, others described themselves as halfies, because their mothers were either British or American while their fathers were Jordanian. There were those who referred to themselves as Palestinian-Jordanian; they are of Palestinian origin. Their parents fled Palestine in 1948 and settled in Jordan, or crossed the River Jordan after the 1967 war. Two of the women I interviewed recently moved back to Jordan after they and their parents were expelled from Kuwait in 1990 in the aftermath of the second Gulf war.

As education is highly valued in Jordan (MOP and UNDP 2000), it is taken for granted that children would pursue higher education. Without exception, single women are cognizant that their parents have paid a high price for educating them. However, their parents did not expect them to assert themselves at home. The changes in their daughters' behaviour is a source of confusion for the parents, who believe that their daughters have veered away from the traditional "obedient" daughter to the outspoken "daring" daughter. One woman whose parents are from the rural part of north Jordan said

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<sup>59</sup> In their introductory remarks to the "Arab Regional Women's Studies Workshop" Nelson and Altorki (1997) stress that Arab females and males struggle because of the forces of change in the region. See Gole (2000) who examines the situation in Turkey, and Davis (1993) who remarks on the situation in Morocco.

*Ya'ni*,<sup>60</sup> they are not used to anyone saying to them yes or no - or this is what I want to do ... My father doesn't tell me I need to be grateful, but I know that it - he - he came from a little village up north. I mean for him to see his daughter answering him back, not giving him the respect that he thinks he deserves, doing what she wants to do. And for my mother the same thing, like she's created a monster (Faizeh).<sup>61</sup>

Strong connectivity with their family means that Muslim and Christian daughters alike are expected to follow the socio-religious injunctions of deferring to (a sign of honouring and respecting their connectivity with their family), obeying (*ta'aet al-walidein*) and seeking their parents' approval (*rida al-walidein*). Daughters owe their parents respect, obedience and a degree of deference because of their sacrifices. Feghali (1997) characterized parent-child relationships in the Middle East as relations of indebtedness, and Abu-Lughod (1986) discusses the importance of deference in familial relationships. When daughters are assertive, parents perceive them to be ungrateful and unloving. As Faizeh notes, her parents felt they had created a monster.

Another source of parental confusion is their dilemma regarding their daughters' marital status. While they are proud of their daughters' professional achievements, they want their daughters to settle down and have a family like other normal adult daughters. One woman, Amira, whose parents are very traditional, said that her parents are desperate to marry her off. They want another male to be responsible for her, so that they will not be accountable for her behaviour. She remarked that her parents' behaviour made her feel that she was a burden on them. "The mere idea that I am capable of doing anything on my own scares them." Her parents' fear reflects their "deep-seated values and beliefs towards women and sexuality" (Parla 2001, 66), and the idea that a woman's conduct could raise or annihilate the family's honour. Amira said

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<sup>60</sup> A colloquial term in Arabic implying "I mean."

<sup>61</sup> Faizeh is spelled this way, and not Faiza, because this is how the participant spelled her pseudonym.



that in her parents' minds, if they could not constrain her, she could go astray and dishonour them.<sup>62</sup> Her sister, Mira, she said, who is also educated and working, is not facing the same problems, because she is less independent. "Mira seeks my parents' advice when making a decision. In my parents' mind Mira cannot completely depend on herself, and is not capable of transgressing her limits, dishonouring the family." Mira is rewarded for her "honourable behaviour" by being left alone to manage her personal affairs at home. Unlike Mira's behaviour, Amira's conduct is a source of strain within the household. Amira claims that her parents are threatened by her independence and assertive nature. To them, her individuality, as a result of her master's degree, is associated with the break up of the family unit<sup>63</sup>. Amira said she was confused because her parents supported her studies. She expected difficulty from society because of her education, but not from her family. She said that her education did not beget her personal autonomy, and being an honourable woman was not easy. It meant denying her agency and imposing self-censorship to please family and society.

Because of their education, single women find themselves struggling to fit into their family while asserting their individuality. They want to show deference to their parents and family elders and in return they want their families to treat them as individual adults, not minors. They are aware that by articulating their needs, concerns and desires, they are on some level disappointing and failing their parents, which is a major source of tension for them. Single women are cognizant of the fact that the dominant communal/group values supersede the individual's. As Faizeh said:

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<sup>62</sup> For an in-depth analysis on society's fear of women's sexuality and promiscuous tendencies, see Memissi's work (1982, 1987a, 1991), Sabbah (1984) and Karam (1998, especially chapter 7). They examine the social discourses on society's fear of women's sexuality in the Arab world, and its influence on people's thinking.

<sup>63</sup> I will expand on this in father-daughter alliances.

It is hard. But this is what modern-day Jordanian women who are single and are working have to endure. *Ya'ni*, this psychological stress of [pleasing your parents]– and the social pressure [of fulfilling the traditional role of honourable daughter] (Faizeh).

The women are aware that their parents don't understand their singlehood status, their need for privacy and a separate life. As a result, the daughters attempt to educate gradually their parents. The process is arduous and uneven "like a roller coaster ride." Yet, this did not mean that once the parents accepted their daughter's life-style it was smooth sailing. This process is always under renegotiation, especially when parents feel that their control over their daughter(s) is slipping away.

Every day they (my parents) have a new problem. One day – I should not go out to this particular place. One day the problem is that I should not be late. At the end of the day – you end up focusing on small, minor issues – and your effort is divided. Your ENERGY is lost, ... I spend two days fighting [with my parents] so that I can just go out to see my girlfriend (Amira).

Some times they'll say it is OK to do a particular thing and at other times it is not – so it is like an 'on and off' situation ... However, it goes through stages when it is good and moments when it is not (Muna).

Yet women have learned to find their own strategies to do "their thing": how to tell or not tell their parents about their plans and practices. Through trial and error, they have found what works best. Some resorted to a method of gradual indoctrination (preparing the ground) whereby they drop hints and start to prepare their parents ahead of time; others resort to indirect methods like "I'm busy now" or "I have plans," or they pretend not to be aware of what is going on the

household, they “pretend ignorance.”<sup>64</sup> There are those who cross their so-called “red lines” to accomplish their goal and then inform their parents in a strategy I call a “fait accompli”

You develop strategies to do things – how to tell your family – that become part of your daily life. You don’t question [yourself] – how will I tell them? Automatically you start preparing them gradually by paving the way and you leave the letter from the British Council for your scholarship acceptance on the coffee table. These acts become part of your subconscious. You make the necessary preparations and introductions – so by the time you say it people are receptive to it. I think we do it a lot (Su’ad).

There seems to be a cyclical pattern in the parent-daughter negotiation/renegotiation process. It starts by accommodating the parents at the daughter’s expense.

Before ... I used to try you know [to please them]. Now I – stopped humouring [accommodating] them at all. If I don’t want to do something I will not! (Faizeh)

Then the daughters gradually start to assert their needs, which create tension with their parents. At this juncture, parents find that they need to accept their daughter’s practice even though they don’t like it.

I try to let them feel that I listen to them – so sometimes I’ll do what they ask me to do but then other times I do my own thing. They can’t always get what they want (Muna).

The parents will tolerate their daughter’s assertiveness up to a point. Once they feel that they are losing ground because their daughter is assuming that her new gained privileges are her rights, the negotiation process is reopened.

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<sup>64</sup> Scott (1985) refers to the practice of people feigning ignorance as the ordinary weapon of the relatively powerless groups.

My parents want me back home at 5 pm because I've been coming home late every day for the past 2 weeks (Amira).

They started to get upset. They said "we gave you lots of freedom" and I think they expected me in return to listen to them and follow their wishes (Muna).

Women are willing to go through this renegotiation process because they believe that although it requires effort in the end it is beneficial

But every single move that I did is always excruciating, *ya'ni* it takes three years to get to go to the States and every move you make, *ya'ni* you go out to a party you have to negotiate it -- everything needs effort - but I was willing to exert the effort to get what I wanted in the end (Faizeh).

Women said they empathised with their parents, they understood their parents' viewpoint, and what their parents considered to be problematic behaviour. As Dana stated, "My parents are part of society and they are affected by societal pressures." Consequently, daughters reined themselves in for a short while until they started a new cycle. Yet, with each cycle women were able to gain some ground. In their next round of renegotiations, women applied some of the strategies they learned in their previous negotiations. The parents were unable to retract the miniscule privileges they granted their daughters.

Each young woman tried to convey to her parents a simple message: "This is me - respect my independence - respect me as a person. "It is interesting to note that the participants felt guilty when they expressed their difficulties and anger towards their parents. Muna summed it up

They [her parents] only act up because they are afraid for my well-being. At least I convinced myself so that I can cope with the situation (Muna).

In the following section, the variation in daughter-family relationship will be examined.

## TENSION IN MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

The mother-daughter relationship in this study is not straightforward but complex. Mothers act as upholders of tradition, custodians of culture, enforcers of rules, and the embodiment of femininity (Elsadda 2001; Kandiyoti 2001) when they steer their daughters towards conventional gender roles. But my data suggests that mothers also can be instrumental in assisting their daughters to forge unconventional gender roles. Women's relationship with their mothers ranges on a continuum from being estranged to being friends. The majority found that they were unable to relate to their mothers. Daughters were not willing to be complicit partners in their mother's reproduction of gendered power relations and identities.<sup>65</sup> Rather, single women's resistance to their mothers' demands indicated the daughters' agency and separate self. In refusing to accommodate or collude with their mothers, daughters challenged their mothers' conception of honourable feminine behaviour. They resisted their mother's attempt to force them to fit into the mould of honourable womanhood, which they perceived as ambiguous. Mothers found their daughters' assertiveness and resistance as unruly forces to be disciplined and controlled, since mothers were under pressure to construct their daughters' honourable femininity (Hatem 1999).

According to the participants, their mothers expected them to silence themselves: to subdue their agency. Yet the single women resisted. Their contestations subverted the GPD within the family (Abu-Lughod 1990; Hatem 1999), but not necessarily within the public domain (Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998), as will be evident in the section on education and professional career. The mothers' response to their daughters' struggle varied. Some mothers initially resisted, and then gradually learned to accommodate their daughters; others gave up on trying to save their

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<sup>65</sup> See Papanek (1990, 177-179) who examines women's complicity in their own inequality. She specifically looks at the socialization process of the mother-daughter relationship.

daughters, but occasionally would show signs of resistance. The few single women who had working professional mothers faced the least difficulty. Perhaps mothers feared that their daughters' challenge of societal rules implied that in the future their daughters might jeopardize the family's honour. Some mothers were willing to make some minor concessions to their daughters to contain their trouble-making behaviour.

#### DAUGHTERS' STRUGGLE TO EXIST AS SEPARATE ENTITIES FROM THEIR MOTHERS

Daughters are aware that their conflictual relation with their mothers stems partly from their insistence on developing a sense of self that is different from that of their mothers. One daughter stated that she reflected everything her mother did not want, because she was a tomboy, and very studious as a child. Others stated that they were always fighting with their mothers over their appearance, they didn't paint their nails, or coiffeur their hair, nor were they interested in cooking. It could be argued that mothers confuse their needs with their daughters' needs, assuming all women should have similar needs. As Hatem (1999, 201) argues "this confusion of boundaries contributed to conflictual relations between mothers and daughters."

The majority of single women perceived themselves as failing to meet their mother's expectations of "fitting the mould of a dutiful and honourable daughter." They know their mothers are desperately trying to instil into them notions of modesty and honourable behaviour. Some of the mothers consider their daughters' assertiveness as disrespectful and improper. In one extreme situation, a mother considered her daughter's self-assertiveness as dishonourable and threatened to have her brother kill her.

Many women confront their mothers' traditional and conservative approach towards life and wish they had mothers who understood them and emotionally supported them. Yet, they aware that the cultural gap between them is vast, for some insurmountable. As one woman said,

I mean my mom is a mom. She loves me in her own maternal way and cares for me – but she is not my friend ... in fact at the time when she was supposed to become my friend – as a teenager - she became my enemy. She pushed me away. And that was both scary and hard ... It is the way she was brought up. She came from a restrictive family (Najwa).

Mothers insisted on scrutinizing their daughters' daily activities. Consequently, the majority of single women considered their mothers as intrusive and overprotective, especially with regard to their reputation. While parents feared gossip, *kalam in-nas*, (Meneley 1996; Wikan 1991), they also used gossip to control their daughters and curtail their behaviour. Many women stated that their mother's "phobia" was what people would think and say regarding their daughter's behaviour. In the women's eyes, they considered their mothers stricter than their fathers. For example, even when fathers did not object to their daughters studying abroad, the mothers did because they believed that females were the weaker sex and needed protection. This was the case for several of the locally educated professional single women. Thus, it can be argued that mothers and not fathers perpetuate the societal GPD.

Mothers' overprotection is not linked to their religious background<sup>66</sup> or their outward appearance: mothers who dress in western attire are not necessarily more liberal than mothers who veil and wear the long *thobe*.<sup>67</sup> One 29-year-old woman had this to say about her mother

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<sup>66</sup> Many people believe that Arab Christians are more liberal than Muslims.

<sup>67</sup> The traditional long and loose garment that women wear either as their dress or as an overcoat.

When I wanted to travel on my own a few years ago to London [on a business trip] – my dad was very excited for me – so was my brother. My brother even gave me all his maps for London – and told me where to go – what restaurants to eat at. Up until the last minute, my mom tried to convince my dad or my brother to go with me! But I insisted [on going on my own] and my dad insisted [too] (Marian).

Her mother's attempt to instil traditional values in her daughter implies that mothers are complicit in perpetuating and reproducing the prevailing GPD (Papanek 1990). Ironically, this mother is Christian. Perhaps as Marian claimed, her mothers' conservative upbringing influenced her decision-making. On the other hand, a traditional-conservative Muslim veiled mother allowed her daughter Tala to visit her future husband, Ra'id, a Palestinian, in Europe for two weeks. Her daughter was on her way to North America to pursue her postgraduate studies and wanted to get to know Ra'id, who resides permanently in Europe. He met her through his aunt when he came to Jordan in search of a wife. Tala engaged in a complex set of negotiations with her mother when she told her mother it was her right to get to know him. The 36-year-old Tala manipulated her mother's fear of her daughter's slim chance of marriage. She also made her mother aware that she was no longer a child. She knew that her mother knew that Ra'id had intentions of asking for her hand in marriage because he had visited their house several times and made his intentions known to her parents. Tala's negotiation skills reflect her knowledge of her rights and her insight into her mother's fears as well as the cultural model of honourable womanhood: marriage. She and her mother devised an arrangement that would elicit the least rejection from the father. Tala would stop in Europe on route to North America, but no one was to know. Tala would marry Ra'id upon her return; consequently, her mother would be accorded an esteemed status by society, because she was able to defy the social odds by marrying her daughter off to a well-established man. Trust, the single woman's age, and the mother's anxiety to protect her daughter through marriage were determining factors.



The behaviour of Tala's mother was unconventional given that her daughter was not engaged, and had not signed the marriage contract. By allowing her daughter to travel to Europe, the mother defied social norms and the social construction of an honourable woman. The father's silence on this matter strengthened his wife's position and enabled their daughter to explore her feelings and the suitability of a future marriage partner. The father's collusion with his wife in subverting the GPD allowed his daughter to break the social norms while maintaining her honourability. Parents' silence and cover were essential in this case. To outsiders the parents gave the impression of supporting the GPD, when in reality they were breaking conventions through indirect/non-confrontational strategies. Tala needed her parents' support and backing to exercise her agency. Her parents' silence is paradoxical. On the one hand, their silence reproduced the image of the docile, obedient and subservient daughter as honourable. Yet, the reverse side is that in their silence, her parents were able to resist cultural conventions and maintain their honourability as well as their daughter's honourability. Tala's family refused to be held hostage to society's definition of honourable behaviour. As a family they engaged in partial compliance, a symbolic compliance, since it conveys the impression of compliance without its substance (Scott 1985). It can be thought of as a strategy of subterfuge (Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998). Unfortunately, partial compliance reproduces the prevailing gender order and cultural norms, making it more difficult to bring about change.

#### MOTHER'S STRATEGIES TO ELICIT DAUGHTER'S COMPLIANCE

A daughter's out-going behaviour reflects negatively on the mother, who is perceived as failing in raising her daughter to be honourable. It disrupts the conventions of the GPD and gains both mother and daughter a negative reputation: daughters as trouble-makers, aggressive, and unfeminine and mothers as failures (Joseph 1994b; Meneley 1996). Consequently, it is not

surprising to find mothers being implicated in their daughters' docility and acquiescence. Mothers resorted to various means to impose their will on their daughters, from emotional blackmail, telling their daughters they were not dutiful, to threatening to inform their fathers when their daughters resisted fulfilling their social responsibilities. For example, not only did mothers expect their daughters to accompany them on social visits, but also expected their daughters to drive them irrespective of any inconvenience

My mom said, [using a guilt trip] "if I didn't raise you I would think I had nothing to do with you. You won't even be sensitive to my needs"<sup>68</sup> (Muna).

When I lived in the States [as a student] my mom and I were like friends. Now [since I graduated with my M.A. and moved back to Jordan] our relationship is different. Here she'll say: "You better come home now because your dad is agitated." She uses my dad's mood as a threat. Many times – my dad is the last to know that he is in a bad mood. She uses his bad mood as a way to get me to come home early (Diyala).

There were times when these mothers interceded on behalf of their daughters in situations where fathers were against a particular issue. Diyala said:

If there are things that I know my dad will not accept – I go to mom – and she gets me his approval. She will always stand by me. If I ever have a problem with dad – she'll stick to my side. The time when I was really upset at work and would come home crying – my father's emotions would come through "you'll leave work!" my mom – on the other hand would say "no – you won't leave – you will fight for your rights." My dad is more emotional than my mom.

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<sup>68</sup> Mothers who use guilt trips over their daughters' display of power struggle are engaging in an act of "superior moral merit" whereby mothers exert their power over others based on the notion of the self sacrificing mother i.e. "power through giving" (Lips 1991, 53). Mothers attempt to gain control and power through their constant display of giving and self-sacrifice.

Most mothers want to see their daughters married,<sup>69</sup> to ensure their daughter's *sutra* (protection),<sup>70</sup> security and to ease the social pressures on them, since they are blamed for their daughter's single status

But lately – not this year, but last year – as I told you – my mom started acting differently - then I realized that my aunt told my mom “it is all your fault that your daughters haven’t got married. You give them all the emotional support – so they didn’t need to get married.” So – she became tough. She was the one who had pressure. Not me (Suha).

Single women want more out of life than just being a wife and mother. The differing attitudes towards marriage are a major source of contention between single women and their mothers. Consequently, many single women complained that their mothers misunderstood them, and felt alienated from their mothers

We come from different worlds, different levels. Ya’ni, she is very traditional in the way she thinks (Faizeh).

Mothers are aware that first, a single woman is vulnerable, considered “fair game” by men, especially if she is “masterless” (Muftuler-Bac 1999, 310), her male kin are not around in cases of death or geographical separation. Second, a masterless single woman’s honour is doubted, since she is neither policed nor guided. Amira’s quote captures the essence of the predicament of the single woman who ends up living without a father/brothers’ protection

Father dead, no brothers ... oh my God! ... Yes, she is respectable, but there is no one to ask about her - *ya’ni*, she is not 100 percent respectable! ... And this FITS typically with our vision in society towards a woman who does not have a father or a brother. That is, OK, there is a question mark on her.

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<sup>69</sup> Amira’s mother wanted her daughter to lose weight to ensure her daughter’s marketability for marriage.

<sup>70</sup> *Sutra* implies more than just protection, as Antoun (1968, 692) notes, it is “a proper moral cover” a woman acquires only after she marries.

*Ya'ni*, in the name of God, you're only respectable, if you have a male in your family.

A small group of women talked about their strong relationship with their mothers. For these women, their mothers are their confidants. They portrayed their mothers as angelic, understanding and supportive. One woman described her mother as a fighter, given that her father is not an easy man to live with. Three women have working mothers with professional careers. One such woman said that her mother by virtue of her profession had lots of contacts and was able to act as her *wasta* and secure her a job.

Mothers will go the extra mile when their daughters invite their friends over. They will do most of the cooking because they want their daughters to have a good time. Perhaps mothers are eager for their daughters to assume the traditional role of hostess, an essential part of married life in Jordan, as noted in the next chapter. Mothers do try to get closer to their daughters, but they lack the tools and are handicapped by their own traditional upbringing as well as their belief in the necessity to infuse their daughters with traditional behaviour. For example, Najwa and Faizeh have noticed a gradual positive transformation in their relationship with their mothers over time

So now recently I feel – that there is -- my parents are really trying. *Ya'ni*, normally my mother is [asking me] – “Where are you going? To whose house?” ... She always asks these questions ... so today she asked me -- as I was leaving to come to you, she asked me where I was going and I didn't answer. She said, “Where are you going?” so I looked at her, as I was leaving. I told her “I'm going out.” She said, “No, I mean are you going to be out for an hour or an hour and a half because I need the car” (Faizeh).

Now, she doesn't say anything. If I want to volunteer and tell her something – where I'm going I will. Otherwise – if she wants to ask, I find her cautious – she'll frame her statements, as “by the way” and not “I really want to know where you are going.” She is trying to be careful in the way she says things. But it took a while. It was tough (Najwa).

Two single women said that they took on the role of mothering their mothers because of their mothers' illness. One, whose mother is bedridden said that not only was she deprived of her mother's attention and care, but was catapulted into a surrogate wife/mother role for her family, denying her of her carefree singlehood life. As the only unmarried daughter, she was expected to assume the household chores and her mother's care. In her father's opinion, as well as society's, her first priority is her mother. A full time nurse would care for her mother but not in the same loving manner that a daughter would. Moreover, daughters are considered to be the closest person to their mother. Religious beliefs play an important role. As she said, "In religion we believe that anyone who helps their parents has a big reward." Thus, as an honourable daughter, it was her primary duty to care for her mother. However, the cost was high.

For me – honestly my life has changed. I no longer can decide that at the last minute I want to go shopping. I can't be spontaneous. I have to plan a day or two ahead if I want to go down town shopping. For example I need to make sure my mom's care is taken care of, the main meal is cooked and no one will be coming over to visit. At work the girls would say let's go out and do this. ... I would feel very upset. Now I've learned to adapt to the situation. I know that if I want to go out – I can't be gone for more than two to three hours – because my mom will be neglected (Reem).

Although she claims she has adapted, her tone of voice when she talked sounded flat, lacking life. Throughout the three interviews, she would sigh frequently and express her desire to have control over time. She compared herself to a married woman who is housebound because of her responsibilities towards her young children. The difference between her and married women is that married women gradually acquire responsibilities, and have time to adjust to the changes, whereas in her case, it was sudden, and she was expected to handle gracefully the changes. The single women's accounts of their struggles with their mother shatter the image of their mothers

as nurturing and understanding. These stories illustrate the struggles between mothers and daughters regarding notions of “honourable womanhood.”

#### FATHER-DAUGHTER ALLIANCES

My dad is not an eastern man when it comes to the woman. Never. He doesn't care whether you [a woman] get married or not. What matters to him is that you are [a] human being – you've accomplished something. He takes an interest in our activities. When we came back from Scotland he sits with us at the lunch table and he takes an interest in the smallest detail of our lives. He is up to date on our lives. He knows our friends – he knows what bothers us at work. You feel he is part of our life (Rula).

My dad ... never yelled at us or raised his hands on us – like what Arab dads are supposed to do – no! No! No! [Even] though he was a military man (Diyala).

When Arab women are construed as victims by the patriarchs of their society, as is the case in Orientalist literature,<sup>71</sup> their fathers implicitly, de facto, are also perceived as ruthless tyrants. Yet, this is not what has emerged through the biographies of single and married women. On the contrary, the Jordanian father has emerged as his daughter's protector, facilitator, supporter, mentor, friend, confidant and mediator.<sup>72</sup> He is her shield. As one participant, Julia, succinctly stated "the father is his daughter's backbone." There is little information on the father-daughter relationship of professional-single-working women in the Arab world. The majority of the scholarly works are on low-income working women, where the father is depicted as the patriarch in its classic meaning.<sup>73</sup> Altorki, who examined elite women in Saudi Arabia, states that

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<sup>71</sup> For a critique there of, refer to Abu-Lughod (2001); Elsadda (2001); Esposito (1998); Gocek and Balaghi (1994); Malti-Douglas (1991); Sabbagh (1996).

<sup>72</sup> A majority of women obtained their jobs through their fathers who acted as their *wasta*.

<sup>73</sup> On working women see: Davis (1978); el-Messiri (1978); Singerman (1995); Shami and Taminian (1990); Shukri (1996). With regard to classic patriarchy, see Pateman (1988).

offspring continue to act with deference towards their parents to avoid provoking their anger and that among the middle – and - younger generation there is decreased formality between parents and their offspring (Altorki 1986, 71-76). Kavar (1997, 210) argues that working daughters in Amman have failed to “reorganiz[e] gender roles or power relations in any significant ways.”

Irrespective of the backgrounds of the female participants, fathers understood the harsh realities of life in the Arab world: the political and economic instability, favouritism, nepotism and the struggles individuals face as they seek a living. The majority of the fathers were aware of the inherent double standards for women in the Jordanian culture. Thus, it was not surprising to hear women say their fathers believed that their education was as important as their brother’s education. Their fathers told them that their education, marriage and motherhood were their sole weapons in life. The women noted that their fathers struggled with their singlehood status after gaining a good education. They said that their fathers considered marriage as the key to their future safety. Fathers, just as mothers, found themselves ensnared in a situation that was unfamiliar to them. As their daughters’ protectors, the women said that their fathers grappled with the question “how could they ensure their daughters’ future well-being: her security and protection”, since they would not be around for ever. Some fathers accomplished this by being their daughters’ confidant, friend, and mentor. These fathers challenged the dominant GPD in society because they treated their daughters as "full" individuals rather than the "second sex."

Because fathers are the legitimising figures in a patriarchal society (they provide and withdraw sanctions) I will highlight the evolving nature of the father-daughter relationship. The question I seek to answer is: “What is the nature of the relationship between the Jordanian father and his single professional daughter”? From the women’s perspectives, I have classified fathers as



liberal, traditional and dominated fathers. These typologies are not exclusive. Fathers do slip from one type into another at various points in times (Figure 4, Appendix E).

### *Liberal Fathers: Complete Support*

As noted above, fathers can make their daughters' education and professional careers possible.<sup>74</sup>

Not only do fathers encourage their daughters to study, but they also push them

My father PUSHED me to study – if it was left up to me, I would have stopped at high school. He believed that the girls should be better educated than the boys (Siham).

Raya's account captures the point I am trying to make, thus I will quote her at length.

He [her father] loves to have all his daughters educated – especially the girls. We are five daughters and one son. My dad is illiterate. When we were young he would sit next to us and open the book and pretend to read. He would turn over the page. I used to get so upset at him when I would ask him to help me with some words and he couldn't ... He changed all the traditions [relating to gender relations] in his hometown– he was after all a traditional and conservative man from Um-Sihan.<sup>75</sup> When the elders of the family would have a gathering on Thursday night, [an all male event], he would take me along. The elders would tease him and say – “but she's a girl” [implying that she was not supposed to be present]. My father would say “I want to make a man out of her.” Sure enough – he knew that I was the oldest of five girls and that we had no brother to take care of us – I mean my brother is the youngest. ... So he wanted to make sure that someone would take care of his daughters. All of us girls are very strong and no one would fool us. We stand up for our rights (Raya)

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<sup>74</sup> In Turkey, it was the support of men that enabled women to enter into public realms (Gole 1996, 78). Sabbagh (1997) noted a similar finding among the Jordanian women she interviewed in her fieldwork. Werthmann (1999) noted that for Muslim Nigerian women, their higher education would not have been possible without the support of their fathers/husbands.

<sup>75</sup> Fictitious name of a small town in the northeast of Jordan.



Her father not only defied tradition in his small community, but also stood up to all the male elders in order to give his daughter the opportunity to improve her English skills and to be exposed to the world. His exposure to Turkish culture as a young man<sup>76</sup> and his state of illiteracy pushed him to educate his daughters and empower them.

When I went to England for a few months – I mean this is something unheard of – for a young woman in Um-Sihan to travel on her own to a foreign country. I remember some men from the town came over to put pressure on my dad NOT to let me go – many people would complain, “your dad is too liberal, he is too open minded” ... Then men would say [to her father] “How could you let your daughter travel on her own?” He would say, “This is her opportunity – let her travel and open her eyes to the world and also learn English!” My dad used to love to travel and learn languages. He travelled several times to Turkey and speaks Turkish! His travel shaped his open and liberal mind. He would say “Raya – I’d throw her in the sea and she would come out dry. What is wrong with you?” (Raya).

Her father had full confidence in her ability and strength of character.

So they [men in the community] would say [to her father] “what would happen if something happened to her uncle and he didn’t show up at the airport to pick her up?” He would say “don’t worry she would manage by asking the English people!” [Laughing]. When I came back – he bragged about my accomplishments in the *diwan* [gathering of the elder men in the village]. To me – I consider my dad a role model – a person to emulate. He was truly a wise man. I really wish that young men today are like him. He was very open minded and liberated with[in] the confines of morality [of the culture]. My dad raised us to be self-reliant and responsible so that we can manage on our own and be independent (Raya).

By resisting hegemonic masculinity, her father opened the door for her, provided her with the space to exercise her agency and empowered her, by ensuring that no one stood in her way. He

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<sup>76</sup> What I specifically mean, is that her father’s trips to Turkey in the 1930s exposed him to Atatürk’s reforms regarding women, the new dress code for women, secularisation of the family code and the enfranchisement of women (Arat-Pamuk 1990; Gole 1996; Kandiyoti 1991a; Toprak 1990).

knew that society was discriminatory of women, especially in the rural areas of Jordan. He acted as her protector, facilitator, and mentor.

Fathers encouraged their daughter's education, had a say in their daughters' field of specialization (Al-Khayyat 1990, 51), and the sector they chose to work for (private/public).<sup>77</sup> They pushed their daughters to pursue conventional degrees and occupations, which were considered respectable and prestigious professions in the community (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993; Rosander 1997). When daughters chose to study unconventional subjects, they faced an upward battle. Yet, as the following interaction demonstrates, Reem finally was able to study her subject, because she used the importance of furthering her education as her bargaining chip.<sup>78</sup> One of her father's main objections to her field of study was his concern with what people would think and say (especially males). Johnson (1997) argues that under patriarchy, men fear what other men might do to them, such as ridiculing them or depriving them of their masculinity: their recognition as real men. For Reem's father, his anxiety regarding people's talk stresses individuals' preoccupation with gossip and their need to vigilantly safeguard their reputation. As I will show later on this chapter, gossip and reputation play a central role in individuals' lives.

My dad would tell me "study English, Arabic language. These are very NICE specializations. When I tell people about them they can relate to it. But if I were to tell them psychology – I mean – what is this psychology? – How can I explain to people that you will be working with people who have mental illnesses and other kinds of problems?" At the beginning, the situation was very tenuous. He'd say, "Either you study THESE certain subjects [excluding psychology] or there is not university." So I'd say, "OK – no university." But what was helpful is that dad loves education and he couldn't make himself deny me my education. When he realized that I was very insistent and

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<sup>77</sup> Work in the public sector is considered to be more secure and prestigious (Hijab 2001; Jansen 1999).

<sup>78</sup> Without exception, the parents of all the participants expected their daughters to further their education. The high regard for education is linked to Islam, which encourages and values education

determined to study what I want he said, “OK you study what you want – it is your life!” (Reem).

My dad wanted me very much to work in the government. Legally you are not supposed to work in both [private and public] sectors. My father’s intention was that the minute I started working in the government he would try to get me to quit running my clinic because he didn’t like the idea that I would work till 8pm in the evening especially in the winter. My dad is like many Jordanians, he believes that working in the government is a much more secure job ... He is trying to get me to leave my clinic (Muna).

A major parental concern emerged during the interviews: parents’ anxiety about their daughters’ safety past sunset, as well as what others might think and say about their daughters’ wandering the streets at night. I will elaborate on this in the section on curfew.

Although fathers push their daughters’ education, they are cognizant that, if their daughters are highly educated, having a masters and/or Ph.D. they might not marry. Some women said that their fathers were afraid for them, and wanted them to be educated only to the extent that it would not preclude them from marriage. Their career-oriented daughters had something different on their minds; they were eager to establish themselves professionally. These women sought to be their own agents and strived for their independence, an idea most fathers could not fathom. Several explanations might explain fathers’ concerns. Either fathers were not raised with the idea that their daughters could be independent agents, or they felt that their daughters’ independence stripped them of their fatherly duties and masculinity. Perhaps some fathers were unable to accept a shift in the power relations. Women said that their fathers always had the last word.

I feel my dad is proud of what I’m doing – but at the same time he is fearful of my future well-being. My dad feels that a woman should first be married, have children, worry about her family. The notion of career is something a woman can think about much later! He’ll bring up this subject once every four months ... Perhaps he is convinced that my education can be

considered to be my weapon, - but to him it is not everything. My first weapon is marriage, my home and kids because he has a traditional mentality! But also he doesn't realize that his idea maybe harmful. Because if I were to get married it might pull my career back by one year! So I think what he is afraid of is that I'm too independent to rely on anyone in the future –“ OK – how can she live on her own?” (Anud)

Fathers respect their daughter's decisions, even if it takes them a while to act on it.

So I told my dad 'I have this favour to ask of you. Please don't send any of my sisters to the University of Jordan because it was so unfair and an unpleasant experience [for me]'. So when it comes to developing your personality and personal growth going abroad is extremely important. I have four sisters – and since then none of my siblings studied here – they all studied in the US (Diyala).

Sabbagh (1997) noted in her research on Jordanian women that fathers' moral/psychological support of the family is an important facilitating factor in their daughter's professional life. The single women I interviewed found their father's unconditional love and support a source of strength.

[I] feel protected so that [his love] gave me that kind of fierceness – you know, [I give the message] “don't mess with me or I'll kill you!”(Jude).

Fathers act as their daughter's complete protector especially when they side with her and not their wife. This is especially the case when fathers are liberal and easy-going and their wife is traditional. Najwa's mother is concerned about what people will think when they see Najwa coming home late at night, but her father is not. Her mother is troubled because her husband is not supporting her and helping her control their daughter. This is how Najwa describes her mother's predicament

Perhaps she would think that if those around me would oppose, I would think twice about it. Also – she might feel that if my dad would object – she would have more internal support. So – she is facing all people's talk – all by herself (Najwa)

At the same time, Najwa's mother is aware that her husband will not interfere in his daughter's life, so she doesn't dare complain to her husband. Najwa said her father didn't believe that his wife had any right to interfere.

Another woman had this to say about her father's support and his reaction to cultural traditions surrounding arranged marriages

My dad refuses this whole idea of a woman coming to check me out for her son. Perhaps it has something to do with his dignity and self-esteem – perhaps he feels it has something to do with him. When he realized that I don't care about this practice – he supported my idea (Hala).

Hala mentioned that she was surprised that her father stood by her. She expected him to side with her mother.

The majority of single women felt close to their fathers. One described her dad as her soul mate. Another said

I think that he regards me - as his treasure. I've always been extremely emotionally close with my father ... I'm my dad's girl (laughing) plain and simple (Jude).

The single women who bask in their father's support share a strong bond of trust. For example, Anud said, "Our relationship is very mature because there is trust between us." Trust has emerged as a major facilitating factor enabling these women to have a wide range of freedoms. These women honour and live up to this bond of trust.

### *Traditional Fathers: Strict and Loving*

Single women whose fathers are traditional and tend to be strict and loving have learned to assert their independence. In these cases, fathers are confused and troubled by their daughter's independent nature, and some are threatened by the shift in the power dynamics between them. These women describe their relationship with their fathers as "problematic". Women's financial dependence / independence does play a role in the gender power dynamics. For Maraya, being financially independent has been helpful

My problem was more with my father --- My father was more like [the] traditional Arab men. He wouldn't allow my mom to work. It was easier for me than it was for my [older] sister. When she came back from college she had to be home when the streetlights were on. When I came back [from college] my dad tried to put rules and regulations, but it didn't work very well. I always fought. ... I guess I had to protect whatever it was that I had to protect! I think you get used to it - I cannot say that my father and I are friends. ... He knows that he cannot control me or that I won't listen if he does try to. I think he's got to the point where he thinks if you can't beat them, then join them! Now that I live alone he doesn't know what I do every day (Maraya).

Ironically, she learned to fight back from her father. As a result not only has her father resigned and let her lead her life, but also heeds her opinion.

I've learned to fight back from my father. My dad *bihsib hisabi* (takes me into consideration when making a decision or before venturing on a project). He knows he can't get away with anything with me anymore ... My father is proud of me, but he is more quiet about it. He shows it, but in a very subtle way (Maraya).

Although Rula is financially independent, she fears her father's power over her. She concedes that she cannot break away from him for fear of unhinging the family. In her case, her notion of connectivity prevents her from being as assertive as Maraya

I feel my father does control my life in one way or another and you can't break away. You can't just say – I want to do whatever I want to do – don't EVER interfere in my life again. Because then you would be destabilizing a whole family ... [He] plants [fear] inside of you. Even when I was studying abroad, [I would worry] what if he calls me and he doesn't find me at home? What if I do this or do that? Three thousand miles away! How can one control your life three thousand miles away? It's horrible (Rula).

Rula's statement shows that she has internalised the social norms of proper conduct for an honourable woman. These norms are her habitus, and as Bourdieu (1977) argues, habitus is embodied within the individual and accompanies the individual wherever s/he goes. Additionally, she is not fully cognisant of her father's confusion about her agency. In one interview she said:

My father always wanted us to work, to be independent, not to rely on anyone. It is part of who you are – you just don't think about.

Yet in another interview she described her father as

Yes, he is very over-protective. He like most parents presumes that you cannot manage your own life and they have to run it for you (Rula).

Muna, a 29-year-old professional woman, who is partially financially dependent on her father, describes her father's confusion with her assertive behaviour and professional career and his fear of losing control over his daughter.

I think my dad is trying to accept this [her assertive and opinionated nature] but he is unable to [laughing] ... Sometimes I feel they are [her parents are] afraid that I will be out of his circle of control [he will lose control of me]. You know [to him] I am a girl and I am doing this and that ... He is afraid of that [my independence]. So he loses his temper at me – because for

him this is the only way he can deal with me – as if he has no other choice (Muna).

In her opinion, her father's struggle has to do with her singlehood and his ambivalence towards her professional career.

The problem is I'm the only daughter and I am already 29 and not even engaged. To them, they cannot comprehend why I am not yet married. To them, the reason that I'm not yet married has to do with the clinic. Now, every time I face any problems they blame the clinic. My dad has threatened to sell the clinic ... my dad doesn't take my work in private clinic seriously. Three days ago when I was going to work – he said, "Let me give you a big bag so that you can put your money in" [he was making fun of her work]. So I said, "Make sure that it is of the highest grade material" (Muna).

Because of Muna's connectivity with her family, she is able to understand her parents' dilemma and empathise with her father's confusion. She was able to defuse a potentially explosive confrontation with her dad by turning his caustic remark into humour. It is difficult to believe that her father doesn't take her work seriously since he paid for her office and medical equipment by taking a loan from the bank. Perhaps the contradiction between his actions and words highlight his personal dilemma that his daughter has chosen to be unconventional: a career woman.

Thirty-year-old Faizeh is aware of her father's difficulty in accepting her singlehood and career. Her story exemplifies the evolving nature of father-daughter relationship over time and their attempt to resolve what each perceives to be honourable behaviour. She remarked that children are expected to obey their father. Yet, her spirited assertive nature did erupt occasionally, and during those moments her parents labelled her a trouble-maker.<sup>79</sup> Faizeh admits that her

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<sup>79</sup> She is fully aware that she is breaking the cultural norms when and asserts her opinion and defies her parents.



education is a double-edged sword. Although it has empowered her, it is a source of contention between her and her parents. She considers her life after her master's degree a "turbulent one", partly because she now talks to her father in an informal manner, as if she were talking to her brothers. Her parents are unable to comprehend her informal manner of speech as a sign of closeness, perceive it to be disrespectful, and consequently feel slighted.

That's what's creating a lot of tension ... I think they really feel that I'm not – *ya 'ni* – my going to the States has ruined me sort of (Faizeh).

Ironically, it is her father who allowed her to study in the United States, though it took her three years of begging to persuade him. It was only after her brothers went that she was finally allowed to go.<sup>80</sup> By the time she started working, her father had retired, and because his income dropped, he no longer was able to meet the financial needs of the family. She is aware that her financial contribution shifted the dynamics of the power relations in the family (Kawar 1997; Shukri 1996).

...the power of the patriarch, in this case my father, was declining (Faizeh).

Her financial contribution, paying for the immediate household needs, and her brother's higher education, Ph.D., pushed her into the decision making circle of the family, formerly her father's exclusive domain

When a decision is made, I should be there because – maybe ultimately I would either be the one contributing – all of the percentage of the you know, money or part of it. A car, marriage, somebody's education, you know? Now – and with that came the independence factor. BUT – but – only to a

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<sup>80</sup> It is not uncommon for fathers to send their daughters abroad to study as long as their brothers are in the background.

certain extent I think, because there was always this – *ya'ni*, there is this red line that you can't cross (Faizeh).

Faizeh is not the only woman who has alluded to this imaginary illusive line that they will not transgress. The “red line” she refers to is her self-imposed boundary that she constructed. She is aware that she can challenge the prevailing GPD up to a point. In her mind, she cannot exceed this red line if she is to be considered honourable. The majority of women are aware that changes in gender relations need to be gradual. In a later interview she said:

I think my father – has come to really respect me and to respect what I -- what I've done, and sees my contribution to the family – *ya'ni*, [he] sees how much I've – BEEN there for EVERYONE, so without questioning without judging without - - for everyone in the family. And I taught him *ya'ni* to -- to deal with me in a sort of – that - that way. *Ya'ni*, now -- even now when I tell him that I want to travel or I want to -- he says. “It's your life and you are free to do what you want” (Faizeh).

Accepting notions of honourable femininity and resisting it both involve risky strategies for single women. The former implies women's collusion with familial and societal values and ceding their agency. The latter places a strain on their familial bonds. Women must tread carefully when defining their notions of honour. They need the protection and support of their family for their social, and in rare situations, physical survival. A woman's complete independence from her family jeopardizes her reputation, and reduces her father and brother's masculinity in the eyes of society, because of the message she is sending society that her male kin are unable to and/or unwilling to protect and control her.

### *Dominated Fathers: Wavering Support*

The trajectory of a father-daughter relationship can be unpredictable. In situations where both parents are conservative, the mother is domineering, and the family's socio-economic status is

medium-low to low, a daughter may experience wavering support from her father, especially if he is fearful of his wife's anger.

Although Amira's father believes in the importance of higher education and encouraged her to finish her masters at the University of Jordan, he did not expect her to grow intellectually and mature, nor did her mother. To him, educating his daughter meant that she would only obtain a certificate that he could proudly display in the living room of his house. On several occasions during our in-depth interviews, she cried and bemoaned her father regretting educating her. Her father, she says, is threatened by her increased independence and perceives her assertiveness and independent thinking as a dangerous matter, ultimately leading to the destruction of the family.<sup>81</sup>

One day my father cried when I told him "I'm free"[to act as I please]. Can you imagine? I was shocked! I didn't know what was wrong. All what I said was, "I'm free." At this point my father said, "I regret that I educated you. I regret sending you to the university. I regret that I allowed you to do all of these things. It was my fault." And he wept. And I didn't understand. Now, I understand that they [parents] don't want me to be independent. Their criteria of how well they raised me is the degree of my dependence on them and my need for them. So, if I've become independent, that means that they have failed as parents. So their criteria of failure is my independence – this is exactly what it means ... My father truly, truly believes that he failed big time in rearing me. Because I became REBELLIOUS which I call independence --- normal, normal independence (Amira).

Because Amira refuses to hand over her salary to her parents, as some of her other friends do, she said her parents accuse her of being American.<sup>82</sup> Her parents view her education and job as the culprit in the shift in the power relations in the family.

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<sup>81</sup> According to Amira her usage of the word "independence" was interpreted by her father as "you are abolishing the family." She said that her independence did not make any sense to her parents.

<sup>82</sup> Implying that she has abandoned her Arab cultural heritage as well as her religion. Nader (1989) argues that the image of the western woman is used to control the behaviour of the Arab woman.

For Amira, her education and economic independence is a source of agony. Her parents want complete control over her income. In their eyes, her income is the family's property. Since she is refusing to cooperate, they have restricted her movements and social activity under the pretence of protecting the family honour. The relationship between Amira, her father, Shukri, and her mother, Subhiyya, is complex. Economics is an important factor, but not the only one. Her parents' emphasis on controlling her income is a manifestation of the complexity of the relationship. Therefore, it is necessary to unravel it. First, the father-mother relationship needs to be examined. Shukri is intimidated by Subhiyya's domineering attitude, and he fears her anger. He loves Amira and is very supportive of her needs whenever they are alone. However, he withdraws his support from Amira whenever he is confronted by Subhiyya, who is threatened by her daughter's liberal thinking. Second, Subhiyya is constantly reminded that Amira is the antithesis of what she perceives to be an honourable woman. Subhiyya believes that the only means available to her to rein in Amira is by controlling her income. Third, Subhiyya is aware that she is able to control her husband and that he has a special spot for Amira. By being angry with Shukri, Subhiyya is able to control him and prevent him from granting Amira her wishes, which would cause Subhiyya to lose her control over the family. Thus, the family's real motive appears to be curtailing Amira's spending power. They try to prevent her from spending her salary to access the internet or for aerobic classes. They accuse her of squandering the family money.

If I say, "It's my money," he'd [my father would] kill me. Because for him it's NOT my money, it's the family's money. I've WASTED it. And he's SO disappointed with me and I'm the biggest disappointment in his life, because I've wasted the FAMILY'S money. "*Baba* (dad) in God's name I've worked all last year and I've saved up this money – it – it's my right to spend it the way I want to. I'm helping the family. It's not like I'm not helping the family!" ... I'm not allowed to go on line anymore, because it's the family's money ... nothing is really

for me! Even in the use of my OWN money – it's NOT mine!  
And this is what drives me CRAZY, and they are not willing to  
understand ... What would make them happy? It's for them to  
take my whole salary and give me just allowance. This is what  
would make them happy (Amira).

However, her parents' real reason is to have power over her. Her parents made it known to her that they consider her their property, and by extension, her income is theirs. Her freedom is not a right, but something that her father can grant her at his whim. For her to gain certain freedoms, she needs to obey him. Her father believes that each family member is a slave of the family, implying that there is no room for individuality. Popular Islam influences his thoughts. Amira's knowledge of Islam enabled her to stand up for her rights, correct her father regarding his misinterpretation of Islam and free herself from his bondage.

He told me "you are a slave with me. You are a slave in this house." And I told him, "Dad, I'm a slave to you?" I said, "What are you saying?" I started to tell him about Islam and what Islam preaches using his logic. However, according to my father's logic, he is also a slave - every one of us is a slave for the family. So – but I – I am a worse case because I'm a girl – you see – and he can control *ALL* my freedom (Amira).

Amira's case firstly exemplifies parents' fear of losing control over what they consider to be their rightful domain, culturally and religiously, and their struggle to hold onto their control as they attempt to deal with their ambivalence towards her behaviour after she secured a good paying job. Secondly, it highlights the interconnectedness of the father-mother-daughter relationship, and the role the mother plays, as an accomplice in reproducing the female gendered identity. Ironically, because of the family's need for Amira's income, they stretched the boundaries of their definition of honourable daughter by not preventing Amira from working in a mixed environment (Sa'ar 2001). Yet, the competition over who has the last word in the control

of young females of the household is not the exclusive domain of the father. Brothers do try to assert their masculinity.

#### SISTER- BROTHER: A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

The fact that I'm very well educated, I have a very good job, very good PAYING job, threatens his [her brother's] manhood, according to his, his own beliefs. *Ya'ni*, he is not making as much money as I am. So that makes him a little bit – in a very awkward situation. I'm the WOMAN – I'm not supposed to gain more money than him. I'm not supposed to go out and come and do all these things without his approval – as my brother. I can't do all of these things. He doesn't WANT me to do all these things. And he thinks that MY money ... are making me – even – more stronger – and in a better position to say 'NO I will go out now'. So, if it was up to HIM, he would NOT let me go to work. And that's why I told my father – if he leaves [if he dies] I – I'll not stay [she will leave the country] because I know my brother could lock me up in my room – for years and not care. My parents are SO LIBERAL, so liberal when compared to my brother. And he plays a very good role in all the problems that I'm having – that he would instigate my parents against me ... [He would ask her] parents questions, cause he wanted to make them kind of suspect where [I] were – what [I'm] doing, [to make them] feel a little bit paranoid. And he succeeded in doing that – every single time. It's like “where did she go? When's she coming? Do you know WHO she went with?” (Amira).

What is the nature of the sister-brother relationship among single women in my research?

There is a dearth of information in the literature on brother-sister relationship in the Arab world. Joseph (1994a) in her article “*Brother/Sister Relationships: Connectivity, Love, and Power in Reproduction of Patriarchy in Lebanon*” argues that the “love-power dynamic” or “connective love/power dynamic” is the core aspect of the brother-sister relationship, and serves to interlink three factors: connectivity, love and power throughout the various facets of the sister-brother relationship – its psychodynamic, social structural and cultural aspects. She stresses that the love-power dynamic serves several functions and delineates three. I will juxtapose my results

with hers. Firstly, Joseph states that the love-power dynamic allows the brother to assert his masculinity, competing with his father in dominating his sister's behaviour. This is what I describe as the brother as a patriarch: enforcer of tradition. Secondly, it allows the sister to exercise her femininity under the watchful eyes of her brother. In my research this occurs when brothers are willing to accompany their sister on a date, act as her chaperone. Thirdly, it allows for the evolvment of the "cultural promise" (p. 58), the brother is expected to protect his sister in return for her obedience and submission. I came across this latter phenomenon during my research. Unfortunately, as Joseph argues, the cultural promise sanctions the brother's use of force to keep his sister in line, since his sense of self, dignity and honour are invested in her behaviour. Thus, the power relationship between them is asymmetrical. Joseph stresses the point that the brother-sister relationship socializes each one of them into their proper gender roles while linking gender, sexuality, love and power together. In the next section I will unravel the complexity of this love-power dynamic. However, before I do this, I will delineate the relationships I came across, which can be categorised into four types.

1. Brothers as patriarchs - enforcers of tradition, protectors of family honour.
2. Brothers as liberators, protectors, facilitators, and mentors.
3. Brothers as reactionary - who are intimidated and threatened by their sister's professional career.
4. Brothers as friends, equals and interested in forging egalitarian and intimate relationship with their sister(s).

## SISTER-BROTHER RELATIONSHIP: IS IT A TRIAD?

Fathers are key figures in sister-brother relationships, either as hidden players in the love- power dynamic or active players; together they form a triad. Within this triad, the brother-father relationship takes various paths, with varying consequences on the daughter/sister. I will highlight the main ones.

### *Brothers Competing with Fathers*

When brothers try to be domineering, they compete with their fathers to be the patriarch (Kawar 1997; Joseph 1994a, Jean-Klein 2000). Most fathers in my research made it clear that parents are the only acceptable disciplinary authority over their daughters. In this case, the father is an active player and protector of his daughter's agency.

I have two brothers. One is three years younger and the other is nine years younger. With my younger brother we were very close and friends. He didn't interfere on my freedom as a teenager – to go out with guys. When we [go] together to the Sport City to swim he never [interfered]. I had friends whose younger brothers used to interfere. I think my dad helped – because he would NOT allow my brothers to interfere (Najwa).

### *Fathers and Sons Colluding*

In cases where sons team up with their father, or persuade their father to restrict their sisters' mobility and/or choices, the collusion can be extremely restrictive on single women's life. Here, the father is the hidden player in his daughter's predicament, since his role may not be obvious to the daughter. For example, there are brothers who have been instrumental in persuading their fathers not to put their sisters in mixed schools because they supposedly fear for their sisters' well being. However, their real concern is to defend their masculinity in the eyes of their friends



(Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998; Johnson 1997). In Jordan, men are pressured to defend their family honour. Those who fail risk losing face among their male colleagues. Thus, brothers assert their dominance over their sisters to protect their own reputation and masculine image among their male friends and society. Yet, they persuade their fathers that they are protecting their sister's honour and the family's (Holland, Ramazanoglu et al. 1996; Hollway 1996). According to the married and single women's accounts, they are aware of the pressures on men to defend the so-called family honour. The rise in Jordanian newspapers' reports on crimes of honour, serve as reminders of the pressures young men are under.

### *Brothers as Sisters' Advocates: Influencing Father*

There are instances where brothers will ensure that their sisters have freedoms and choices, albeit limited (Jean Klein 2000). For example, one brother persuaded his parents to allow his sister to work in Amman even though they lived in Irbid (a major city that is about an hour's drive from Amman). The brother found respectable lodging for his sister.<sup>83</sup> Another brother persuaded his father to allow his sister to continue her work after his mother was suddenly bed-ridden. Were it not for her brother's influence and gentle persuasion, she would have not been able to continue her professional career. In both cases, the brothers were instrumental in shifting the father-daughter relationship. They sensitively pushed their fathers to be in harmony with the demands of modern life, whereby they are no longer traditional fathers, but progressive fathers.

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<sup>83</sup> Her brother rented a room in the university student-housing centre. This housing arrangement is considered culturally to be a respectable housing arrangement, since women living there have to abide by the university's strict regulations.

## ROLE OF DAUGHTER/SISTER IN THE TRIAD

What is the role of the sister/daughter in this triad? As in the case of Amira, sisters resist their brothers' power over them. However, the process of resisting is not always smooth and is dependent on a woman's relationship with her father. Their resistance illustrates that the majority of single women have not accepted gendered roles as natural; rather, they are reminded of the double standards and their brothers' privileges by virtue of their gender. Many of the single women have stated their relationship with their brothers has improved, as both got older. As Salam said:

As children my brother and I used to fight a great deal. Now, since college – we are much closer.

*Sisters as Complicit Partners in Their Brother's Domination:*

*Choice, Resignation or Deliberate Strategy?*

There are single women who are implicated in reproducing the double standard. For example, Raya's brother is a product of his culture, especially since they live in the north of Jordan, a rural area. Because she is the oldest and is the main wage earner of the household, her brother does not say anything to her, but asserts his masculinity on the younger sister

Given that he is nine years younger. But because he is a product of this society – he is affected by it. For example my younger sister – who is closer to his age – has the habit of going up on the roof and talking with her girlfriend who is on the roof. He'll say, "If I were walking on the street – and as a young man I were to see a woman on the roof making movements with her hands – what would I think?" We all know that her behaviour bothered him. So I'd tell my sister if you want to talk to your neighbour – why don't you call her or go and visit her. But – *haram* [figure of speech, implying that she pities him] – he never has said any harsh words, yelled or hit anyone (Raya).

Although Raya accepts a liberal role for herself, her silence regarding her brother's role of disciplining her sister makes her an accomplice in reproducing gendered roles, and proper behaviour. As Joseph (1994a) argues, Raya's relationship with her brother and sister is an example of the love-power dynamic between brothers and sisters. The dynamic is vital in her brother's "empowerment and masculinisation" and her sister's "domestication and feminisation" (p. 52).

Salam, although she said she wants her future husband to help her out in household chores, does not press her brother to do the dishes at home

Salam: Occasionally he'll do the dishes – but mainly he runs our errands. He just doesn't know how to do things. So we give him small tasks that he can manage with.

Leah: How old is he? [I'm assuming he's a child].

Salam: He just graduated last year from the university with an engineering degree.

Leah: So why don't you teach him?

Salam: *Haram*, he really tried and he wants to help out.

Leah: Well, so why don't you give him to do the dishes?

Salam: Because he won't do them the way we want it done [the real truth].

Through her need to maintain and control her own standards of cleanliness, she unwittingly reproduces the gendered hierarchy in her relationship with her brother.

Amira, on the other hand, is angry about being forced to reproduce the double standards.

My brother was sitting, and all of them were sitting around, and I had just returned from work, and I hear this talk, I had a bad day, ... I wanted to go to sleep. And then I had to go clean the kitchen. "Well, why should I clean the kitchen?" [arguing with her mother]. "Go do the dishes" [her mom replied]. "But I hadn't even had lunch – I was not home all the time. Your sons are the ones who just had lunch. Why do I have to clean after them? I was working – I'm working not for me – not for myself. I'm working to get you – to get YOU the money and my brothers are sitting around. So the least that they can do is basically help around with the home. I'm taking up the responsibility of a man and a woman at the same time." However, MY rights are exactly the rights of a woman who is doing NOTHING, a woman – who's a zero person. This means, I have duties, FULL duties and zero rights. It's not just full duties – it's DOUBLE duties. It's not like it's used to be for my mom. During my mom's time – her young brothers would spend money on the household, and she used to work and buy for herself clothes. Now during our time – everything has totally changed. Now, I have to work [in paid employment], spend all my money on the household and come back and work at home too! In addition to all of this, I'm forbidden to go out, and I must wear the *hijab* and I must dress very modestly and I must, must, must. It's just unbelievable, just unbelievable! (Amira)

Amira succumbs to doing the household chores because her father is a hidden player who, through his silence and non- interference with his wife, is an accomplice in ensuring the gendered hierarchies. With her mother unrelentingly pressurising her, and her brother playing the patriarch, Amira chooses to do the chores. Her choice is pragmatic because she lacks family support in this instance and knows that failure to do her "natural" work would result in her being confined to the house even though she is 25 years old. Amira is aware of her capabilities, and the opportunities she has in light of her positioning within the family. Therefore, her strategy of resignation is intended to maintain her limited freedom of socialising with her female friends and to ensure her family's support in times of crises.

### *Brothers: Protector of Family Honour and Patriarch*

When fathers take a “laissez-faire” approach towards the daughter-son relationship, a daughter’s agency is affected. Either she is unable to exercise her agency fully because her brothers will interfere directly, or they make their values known, and she will curtail her own activity to avoid problems. For example, Faizeh’s parents don’t mind if their daughter goes out, however her brothers do.

My parents have no problem with me going out. But I know that they [my brothers] would have a problem - - they would never tell me not to [go out] but my brothers would have a problem if I went out dancing for example on my own with a group to J.J’s [a disco] let’s say (Faizeh).

Because a woman knows that she needs her father and/or brother’s support to survive socially in the culture, she works diligently at maintaining her connectivity with her father and/or brother. When fathers abdicate their power to their sons, a woman knows that she must keep her relations with her brother(s) good. Therefore, a woman will curtail her activities to remain on the good side of her brother.

Faizeh is aware of the powerful hold her brothers have over her life. In the first interview, she mentions that her brothers know that they cannot interfere in her life since she has become the major financial contributor for the family. However, in the second interview, she says that even if she wanted to move out of her parent’s house and live on her own she could not because her brothers would prevent her. This implies that she fears her brothers’ reactions in activities that may endanger her family’s reputation and knows that her brothers are more traditional and conservative than her father. This is what she said in the first interview,

My relationship with my siblings really changed because I contributed [financially]. I put one of my brothers through school and I – helped another one really heavily in his education. I felt that they had more respect towards me ... Plus – they couldn't, like they did before ... they couldn't impose their values on me. ... For example my brothers – stopped me from swimming in mixed pools, from going out to parties late at night when I was a teenager. This time [after she returned from the States], ... one brother ONCE only commented that – “Maybe you shouldn't go.” And I told him “don't you ever, ever, ever interfere in ANYTHING that I do. *Ya'ni* -don't ever interfere.” And I know it's because of how much I contributed to the family and *ya'ni*, where my power has changed, that he didn't make a big deal out of it. Because I know that if he went back to my father – I would tell the same thing to my father and it would be acceptable because of my new position. *Ya'ni* I really felt a change in – the power that I hold in the family because of – my growing - sort of financial contributions, let's say (Faizeh).

In the second interview regarding moving out into a place of her own

Faizeh: I would be physically prevented from moving out. I mean ...

Leah: By?

Faizeh: By everyone, to begin with my brothers. This concept does not exist.

Leah: Although your brothers are not here [live in the US].

Faizeh: No - they will COME here. No [moving out] that's impossible.

She states that even though her brothers live in the United States she has no doubt that they will fly to Jordan to discipline her, if they feel they need to protect the family honour. She fears people might gossip and say, “This girl is loose *ya'ni* that would be it, they would talk about my parents and talk about me. My brothers would go crazy.” Thus, brothers take on different roles

depending on their attitudes and situation. They can slip between being supporters and enforcers of tradition.

In cases where fathers are active players, both brother and father act as a young woman's protector. For example, when Reem's colleagues are spreading rumours about her and jeopardizing her reputation, she takes advantage of the role her brother and father play in protecting her

When my dad or brother came to visit me at the centre I would insist that they would meet all the staff so that no one would think that I am hiding anything from my parents [doing something wrong]. In spite of this – they [staff] still would throw hints [questioning her honourability] (Reem).

Single professional women working in large organizations are conscious that they are the centre of gossip. There is an assumption that single women who have freedom to work and lead semi-independent lives are loose (Youssef 1978, 79). Ironically, this woman is veiled, yet because she interacts with ease with her male colleagues many are suspicious of her behaviour. There is an assumption among her colleagues that veiled women are honourable as long as they minimise interaction with the other sex. Yet, because the nature of her profession, Reem is forced to interact continuously with her colleagues. She understands the mentality of her colleagues and her strategy of having her brother and/or father talk to her colleagues is deliberate.

Because Reem's brother understands the mentality of semi-professionals and working-class people, he is concerned about her.

When I started my work he [her brother] would come and ask me directly how things were with me and my male colleagues. He would also do it indirectly while we are sitting on the swing on the porch "how was your work today? Was everything all right?" and then he would proceed to ask other questions and

finally he'd say, "If there is anything at work that is bothering you or you have a problem then you let me know. I want you to know that you can talk to me" (Reem).

Her brother wants to make sure that her male colleagues are not hassling her and are aware that his sister has a brother who will protect her from male harassment and defend her honour.

It is ironic that because she is veiled her colleagues automatically hold her to a higher standard of morality. Her reputation is under scrutiny at work, which forced her to seek her father and brother's help.

To them [her colleagues] being veiled means that I'm very straight [i.e. limit verbal intercourse to women] – I should not talk to this person [man] or joke with that person [man]. Other women because they are not veiled – it is OK for them to talk with men and joke. But me – because I'm veiled they'd say, "Did you see that – she is veiled and she is talking with that person [man]." I used to notice that a lot. I would get upset. As if by wearing the *hijab* I'm supposed to automatically be more religious (Reem).

#### *Brother as Protector, Liberator, Facilitator And Mentor*

Salam met her fiancé while studying at the University. Her brother and her fiancé were also students there. When asked what her brother's response was regarding her fiancé she responded:

[Laughing] – as the typical Arab brother – my brother was slightly disturbed ... he felt it was his duty to check him out and find out more about him – especially because my fiancé and I are close in age. ... So as the only brother with three sisters, my brother felt it was his responsibility to watch out for my well-being. He wanted to check out things for himself. I prepared my fiancé about this matter and he said, "This is normal. I would do the same if it were happening with my sister" (Salam).

Reem has two brothers and her relationship with them differs. She is closer to her older brother, who has taken the role of the father in disciplining the younger brother and making sure that he



helps his sister. Reem is fortunate that her relationship is very close to her older brother and does not have to worry about him trying to control her. On the contrary, he defends and watches out for her interests. For example, he tried to persuade their father to allow her to continue her job after her mother became bedridden. By defending her interests, her brother reinforced his sister's honourable intentions and positioning. In addition, her older brother's loving approach towards his sister is in opposition to the stereotype of the traditional brother as abusive

My brother played a major role – he helped convince my father that I need to continue working. It is important for my sanity and well-being and that the nurses will give mom the proper care she needed. Then my dad realized how helpful my work was to us (Reem).

To ensure that her needs would be addressed, Reem's strategic manoeuvre was to seek her older brother's help rather than her father's in a dispute with her younger brother. She is closer to her brother and knows that he will support her whereas her father may not. Her practice accorded her brother the status of "honorary father."

There was a time that my [younger] brother would wake me up at 12 midnight to give my mom her medicine – I mean he was not willing to learn how to crush her medicine and mix it with some food and give it to her. So after a couple of times I told my oldest brother to talk to my youngest brother and have him give mom her medicines. Usually my younger brother takes a nap in the afternoon. I don't get the chance - and he stays up past midnight studying and it [the feeding] doesn't take more than ten minutes. So now my younger brother is willing to do it. But it took a lot of work (Reem).

### *Brother as Reactionary*

The opening quote in the section "sister-brother: a complex relationship" speaks for itself. Amira's case is a reminder of the crucial role a brother can play in his sister's life, particularly where fathers are traditional, and seek their sons' advice on how to respond/discipline their

daughter(s) (Kawar 1997). Moreover, through their parents' silence and lack of objection, brothers are able to dominate their sisters. In these cases a woman's brother and her parents reproduce not only the symbolic capital of honour, but ensure its doxic nature. Thus, brothers can shift the power balance in the father-daughter relationship in favour or disfavour of his sister(s).

Muna, like Amira, is very different from her older brother. Her brother lives on the second floor of their building and tries to assert his masculinity, in the presence of his wife. On one occasion he tried to interfere in her life

Once I was [planning on] going ... on a hunting trip. [My brother's] wife is from ... a very conservative town where women don't do such things as hunting. So he [my brother] - in front of his wife ... said "I know what goes on these hunting trips. You are forbidden to go on it." I said, "Excuse me. What are you saying? I am in your house right now – but if I were somewhere else I know how I should respond to you." And I left his house. So he then came down and said, "I know that my opinion does not mean anything to you and that you will go ahead and do what you want to do – but talk about such things [hunting and going out with mixed groups] is forbidden in the presence of my wife" (Muna).

Her brother asserted his masculinity and attempted to establish traditional gender roles in his wife's presence because he feared that his wife might think that he did not have control over his sister and is less of a man. He also wanted to keep his wife ignorant of his sister's life style and to limit what his sister could and could not say in his wife's presence, so that he could maintain control over his wife.

## SISTER-BROTHER INTIMACY

With my brother – [we are] so intimate -- our childhood was so intimate we were so close as children that we relate to each other as children till now – not as adults in any way – shape or form ... So we [have] like this EXTREMELY close bond, *ya'ni*, to the point that it actually frightens me because – it's sort of like – [he is] such an extreme part of me ... that – I can't recognize myself without him ... (Laughs) ... And – I don't think I could live without him, for one day for one second (Jude).

I have only one brother. He is younger than I. We argue a lot – but we have a very, very strong emotional tie – we love and care for one another a great deal – it is the seed for everything (Nahla).

He is so over-protective of me that it is not normal. Even if I have an argument with my sister or my mom – he will side with me even if I am wrong. If I needed anything it will be there just like that. He is so helpful – he would do just anything for me. And I'm willing to do anything for him (Hala).

I feel the most comfortable with my brother. Many people are surprised by my relationship with my brother. We go out together for coffee – sometimes for dinner and when we walk in the street, we walk hand in hand. I think if anyone were to see us they would think we are engaged. Many times we stay up at night and we talk. We can talk about anything – but there remains a few things that you can only share with your sister (Reem).

Reem understands her brother's role as her protector. As her older brother, it is his duty to defend her, uphold her honour and the family's honour. Therefore, she deliberately refrains from telling him about any man she might be attracted to because he doesn't trust other men, and is afraid that they would try to take advantage of her innocence. Through her silence, she protects him from unnecessary worry (Jean-Klein 2000). Her decision is illustrative of the strong bonds of connectivity she has towards him, and he has towards her.

This is what Hala had to say about her brother's response when she started dating her boyfriend

He wanted to get to know them [interrupted by her cellular phone] – anybody that I went out with – [she whispered why – inaudible] – but he always said that he would always support me with anyone I went out with. And he said, “If you need help with your parents – I’m there – even though I don’t approve” (Hala).

Not all brothers are supportive; in some cases, sisters have to teach their brothers to respect their life

But my brothers never tried to control my life or tell me what to do. Sometimes they may have tried but they never got away with it [implying that she would put them in their place]! They would never dare to do it in my face. And if they ever did, it was because they worried about me (Maraya).

#### SISTER-SISTER RELATIONSHIP

Very little was mentioned by the women regarding their relationship with their sisters. The majority said that they were very close to their sisters. In two cases, the single women had a turbulent relationship with their sister because the sister acted as an informant and told their parents everything they were doing. Having examined women's personal family life, I want to explore what it means to these women to be single.

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SINGLE?

A nightmare. ... And people have the right, when you are single, to just butt into your personal life here. They are very rude ... This is ... my personal life. So you become vulnerable to sort of butting in – invasion from any Tom, Dick and Harry (Jude).

It means lots of options and lots of restraints. It is like looking through the barred window of a prison cell and you see life and

people doing things – you can see all of this – but you can't go outside and do that. You can see the beautiful world outside and you would like to be a part of it – somehow – some way – but you can't because you are in prison. This is what it means to me. Because it is the way it feels. You have so many options but you can't reach any of them because people dictate to you what you can and cannot do – they place the limits on you – they decide for you what is right and what is wrong. .... It's so – it's like torture ... In a way I wish I wasn't so educated – I didn't know a lot (Amira).

[It means] living in a world where you know you are constantly judged (Maraya).

It's tough going against the tide (Faizeh).

Single women feel strangled because of the social restrictions imposed on them. They perceive that they have limited freedom because they are unable to lead their lives as they want. Being single means fighting constantly for independence and freedom from family interference and society's intervention. It means establishing boundaries to limit people who think they have a right to interfere in their lives because they are single. Jude referred to her status of singlehood as a nightmare because it is akin to living in an invisible prison. Amira also feels that she is living in a prison when she described her life as being restricted. Her descriptions are poignant, especially because she relies on the use of metaphors to make her point (Goldberger 1996).

Single women's greatest fear is gossip. They live with this fear of being judged by people, as they struggle to incorporate their individual values into a society that believes in collective ideals. They persist with an internal conflict between the love for the values of family life, and the encroachment of societal values on their individuality. This conflict is the source of their split or what Narayan (1992, 266) refers to as "the dark side", because they inhabit two mutually exclusive paradigms with opposing social reality: individualism vs. collectivism. They try to be

themselves, to hold onto their individual values as well as the communal values.<sup>84</sup> These women want to incorporate both ideals into their lives because they are interconnected. Their lives highlight their attempt to define for themselves what it means to be an honourable woman. This task is arduous because they have to manoeuvre carefully between their personal life, social life and work life. They are mindful of the interconnectivity of these spheres. They are wary because a blemish on their reputation will compromise their honour, and that of their extended family. The loss of their honour “leads to the accrual of collective shame that cuts across gender lines”(Afsaruddin 1999, 14). Furthermore, as Mackey (1987) argues, one’s honour determines one’s image and value.

It is obvious that families are concerned about their daughter’s reputation and they go to great lengths to protect it when they invoke curfew times on their daughters, irrespective of their age. Until a woman gets married, her family and society remain obsessed by her conduct because of their fear of her sexual appetite, her naiveté, her vulnerability and her need of protection. The notion of honour, reputation, sexuality, marital status and conduct are inextricably intertwined in the lives of women, especially single women. These factors greatly influence women’s capabilities (Nussbaum 2000), and action potential (Chowdhury, Nelson et al. 1994). Najwa captures women’s dilemmas when she said

Even if you don't care what people think - you end up caring because your behaviour reflects on your parents, extended family - they are part of society ... I think as individuals, we are brought up to care about what people think of us. We even dress

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<sup>84</sup>As Bano (1999) notes, single women’s need to belong to their family implies that their sense of identity falls in line with communitarian ideology and not liberal ideology. The single women I interviewed are struggling between their desire to be perceived as individual women within their own right and their identity as a member of their family, i.e. their identity is subsumed within their family name. Boulby (1999) notes that for Jordanian women (especially veiled women) their quest for their “authentic” identity is more complex than for men. Women tend to be preoccupied with their alleged moral superiority compared to the “depravity” of their western counterparts.

to impress. Even when we say we don't care about what people think and say about us ... we actually do. No matter how much we say we don't care about what people think – when we find out or hear that people think negatively of us – which categorizes our reputation – it does matter to us – we [be]come prisoners to it – it does affect us. So reputation in our country is what people think of you and perceive you as – it's really – pressurising, 'cause people victimize you.

Or as Rula states

You don't own your life. You can't take [make] decisions just like that. You have to take into consideration those who are around you [parents]. It is a situation that you just can't change, so you learn to live with it. You just cope.

So, being single means their decision-making is affected by what people think,<sup>85</sup> reminding women of their connectivity and interdependence on their family, and their positioning within their familial, social, and professional spheres. Yet, as women's comments show, they live with a feeling that they have to protect their reputation with constant vigilance. There is no escape, even for those who don't place a high value on the significance of reputation.

That is one of the things you deal with here. Because no matter how emancipated I want to think I am, I am not as emancipated as I want to be. ... But you are still caught by the idea of reputation. I think it is something planted in you. You think about it. I worry about it. It has to do with relationship between men and women ... so I'm caught by that. It is SO difficult, because we live in a small village here. You will always be labelled. And you have to choose the label you want to be pinned on you. I don't want people talking about my private life in public (Maraya).

Maraya points out that a woman is constantly haunted by fear for her reputation. Since there is no escape, it is up to her to decide how she presents herself. However, a woman's character and

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<sup>85</sup> It is more than taking into consideration what others think, one must be aware of the reaction it may elicit by significant people since it has direct consequences on the final outcome.

reputation are not solely based on her behaviour, actions, attitudes, and personal traits. Rather, her reputation and character are directly linked to others' opinions of her as a person. This means that women have limited control over their reputation since it is dependent on what their community bestows on them (Bailey 1971). The women I interviewed believe they have the power to impose a respectable image on people. The majority have said "you impose yourself on others", implying that they can demand a particular kind of treatment and respect. What they are trying to do is to create for themselves a semblance of control. They need to believe that they are in control to survive within society. Their statement is their attempt to empower themselves. In this respect, women are engaging in a dialectical relationship with society by taking ownership of what is meaningful to them and to society.

From the above quotes, it is obvious that to be single means to have limited options in personal and professional life because of (a) connectivity to family, (b) honour directly linked to behaviour and others' perception of them, and (c) family honour linked to behaviour. They are constantly being reminded of their need to maintain an honourable reputation. Single women find themselves having to construct strategies to safeguard their reputation as honourable women as they engage in their day-to-day activities. Their need to protect their reputation consumes their lives. Most women feel their way through their daily life. They test the waters as they struggle to resist the social norms. The majority of single women feel that they cannot breathe because of the social restrictions they encounter. To cope with maintaining their reputation, those who are lucky, escape once a year to Europe or Northern America for a vacation. The minute they leave, they feel lighter because of the absence of a scrutinizing societal gaze

When I go on vacation to a European country, I feel like a chip is off my shoulder, even though I don't do anything different! But, you feel a sense of freedom that you don't feel here! I think it is knowing that people don't judge you. Knowing that you are



not being judged for what you wear, or if you sit on the sidewalk, or if you like to run through the park. You are not judged. And it is the judgement here that puts the heavy weight on your shoulders. You are being judged continuously. Regardless of whether you are hearing it or not. It is happening. I notice that feeling. When I go on vacation, I feel this *oof*, this something, this weight that has been taken off. It is just doing the simple things and knowing that you are not being judged (Maraya).

Those who cannot travel find other ways to alleviate the pressure. A few have found solace through cyber-chat. They can chat with as many males as they would like, on any topic, and no one knows. These chats lead them to establish “cyber” friendships with men. All the women concur that societal judgement and gaze are a source of anxiety.

## CULTURAL ETHOS OF HONOUR

The cultural ethos of honour demands the protection of family reputation; thus, the family has an investment in “the politics of reputation” (Bailey 1971). Sanctions are invoked whenever the family perceives their daughter’s behaviour is a threat to the family name. Women conform to codes of honourable behaviour not because they believe in it, but because of the fear of sanctions, and threat of social death.

## CURFEW

The majority of women have to abide by a time curfew imposed on them by their parents, to maintain their family’s honour. Although their daughters are allowed to go out in the evening, as honourable women they are expected to be home by the early hours of the night. To do otherwise means that the family has to suffer from the wrath of social gossip. Upper class single women have the freedom to go out at night, though they do have a curfew time around 11 pm. Single women from middle-income groups have a curfew time that is around 9 pm in the

summer and about 7 pm in the winter. Faizeh bitterly talks about the contradiction of being a modern Jordanian woman. To others, her parents are perceived to be ultra modern because she was allowed to study in the West. To her, her parents are conservative because she has an 11 pm curfew time after living on her own for a few years in the West. All the single women are critical of the double standards imposed on them. They are angry that their family allows their brothers to come and go as they please.<sup>86</sup>

Maraya is critical of men's hypocrisy, especially when they stop their daughters from doing certain things, while they engage in it. She defies the double standards, which to her are meaningless. Men's hypocritical acts, she claims, have set her free. Yet she does concede that she is not as free as she would like to be, because she does have to worry about her reputation, even though she doesn't believe in the principle of honourable reputation.

Some women said that the trust they have with their parents enables them to have freedom of movement, but upon close examination it is clear that the parents would rather have their daughter home early in order to keep their honourable status in society

Leah: When you want to go out and do things do you need your parent's permission?

Salam: Not permission – but to inform them – so they know where I am! The most important element in my relationship with my parents is TRUST. As long as they raised us to trust us in our behaviour and activity – they will be relaxed. So no matter where you go or how late you stay out – they know you are not doing anything wrong.

Leah: When you go out with your fiancé are you expected to be home by a certain time?

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<sup>86</sup> Only one woman stated that her father imposed the same restrictions and curfew times on her and her brother.

Salam: Not really – but it is preferable that I'm home before it gets dark – unless there is a wedding party that we are invited to attend. For example tonight I am attending a party with him [fiancé] till 10 pm. It is OK – they trust him and trust me.

In addition, some women need to inform their parents a few days in advance that they plan to go out in the afternoon or may be arriving home later than usual.

My dad prefers that we don't go out of the house after the evening prayer (sunset) – not because he wants to control us – but because he worries about us - he is overprotective. If we tell him a few days before that we are planning to be out – he has no objection (Nawal).

The women's complicity in adhering to curfew times implies the importance they place on having a positive reputation and on their connectivity with their parents. As noted in chapter two, women are guided by core emotions of pride and shame, in what Scheff (1988) refers to as the deference-emotion system, because they want to be rewarded for their behaviour. They fear losing the social bond. This "emotional-relational structure" (Scheff 2000) and their connectivity are the emotional bonds – known as cathexis - necessary for maintaining the prevailing GPD (Connell 1987).

In engaging in their own self-surveillance (Bordo 1993; quoted in Stewart 1999, 381), women reproduce their honourable gendered identity (Connell 1987; Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998; Hollway 1996), and engage in gendering themselves (Coltrane 1998; Jamieson 1999). For example, Maraya actively polices her behaviour for fear of unwittingly offending anyone, since she does not subscribe to all cultural practices. She tries to be discreet and circumspect in her acts.

I don't want people talking about my private life in public ... I try as much as I can to be culturally sensitive, to keep myself out of the vicious gossip, to keep to myself as much as I can. I

know I can't keep myself out totally. So I try as much. So whatever comes out of it, I don't really care (Maraya).

'Anud is cautious in her actions because she know society is unforgiving in its gossip. Her personal life and public/social life are inter-related, and gossip in one aspect of her life will affect other aspects. For example, she refuses to go out alone in a car with a male friend just to avoid needing to clarify the situation to anyone. She applies self-censorship

For example, many people know who you are, what you are doing, so you are under the spotlights – so you have to be more cautious ... When I was young I used to say what people say doesn't bother me. But in all honesty – if I hear one word it bothers me. It adversely affects me and the way I deal with the world ('Anud).

Some women find strategies to circumvent the cultural restrictions. For example, single women who own cellular phones break their parent's curfew time by telling their parents, "You know where to reach me. You have my cell-phone number. I'll only be half an hour late." By keeping their parents informed about minor changes in their plans, their parents are abreast of their daughter's whereabouts. These women employed the strategy of partial compliance to squeeze in some extra time for themselves, which they otherwise would not have been able to have. In partial compliance,<sup>87</sup> women accept some aspects of social traditions, but are reluctant to comply in all aspects. They conform to minimal standards of what constitutes honourable behaviour; their practice "falls short of overt defiance"(Scott 1985, 26). In a sense they engage in acts of self-policing. On the other, hand Nawal engaged in complete compliance because she followed through on her father's wishes. Maraya used *fait accompli* when she decided to move out from

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<sup>87</sup> Compliance does not necessarily mean complicity. Overt appearance of compliance, such as a woman's deference to her male kin, doesn't mean that she is ignorant of the unjust acts towards her; it may simply reflect her survival mechanism in a situation where she is constrained (Agarwal 1997).

her parent's house and live on her own. She occupied a vacant flat that her father owned, furnished it, and then announced to her parents that she had moved out. Laughingly she said that her parents were not even aware of her move, because she has such an active life. This strategy can be thought of as a done deal. It differs from partial compliance in that Maraya announced her deed after the fact. Her parents were caught off-guard and could not do anything about the matter. In resignation, they accepted her act.

## REPUTATION

Many mothers remind their daughters about the importance of their reputation. A common proverb women referred to is, "A girl is a jewel, she is like a diamond, if it [her reputation] is scratched it [she] is worthless." Nahla explains why her reputation is important

Of course it [my reputation] will affect me! Because if it gets scratched – it's gone. In our society a man will stay a man – no matter what he does. A woman if she does something they'll talk about her, it is '*aib*', it is her behaviour, her dignity. So we try a lot ... to monitor our back closely to avoid hearing one word. In our society – they will forget all the good things you've done and remember the one mistake you did. So you try very hard to take into account everything, to calculate [your every move] even on small things. All what a woman has in this country is her reputation. This is our society – and you have to live in it. So it is important for me to know that I'm thought of being dignified, respectable.

In other words, the only thing a woman can fall back on in this society is her social reputation. Because of concern for their reputation, they use energy in devising strategies to protect their reputation, instead of focusing on personal and professional growth. Reputation plays a central role in women's lives, and all women have at some point in their discussion referred to their need to guard their reputation. To these women, it has acquired a symbolic capital. They go to great lengths to protect their reputation and have on some level accepted their hymenization and

engage in a politics of reputation. Their behaviour (partial compliance) is discreet, circumspect verging on secrecy.<sup>88</sup> On the surface they appear to be deferring to their family and socio-cultural norms. But, in reality they are contesting them. At the same time, their strategies imply that women are aware of the high stakes involved (jeopardising their family's honour and social integrity) and the ensuing moral outrage if and when they openly challenge their family's authority and/or society's norms. They fear their family's retaliation such as being ostracised (losing their status and protection of their family)<sup>89</sup> or restricted to the home. Therefore, women weigh their short gains against their long-term losses (Korpi 1985; Scott 1985).

The consequences of having a bad reputation are not the same for all women. Rather, they are dependent on the social and economic sanctions that are invoked to punish that particular individual.<sup>90</sup> Women are clearly aware that abiding by social norms pays high dividends. It allows them to have a good reputation, and to be considered as honourable. Consequently, they decide which plan of action best suits them. There is a lot at stake for them if they were to act on their thoughts and feelings. Thus, the politics of maintaining a good reputation is a woman's weapon against the social arsenal of gossip, which is destructive (Bailey 1971). It is no coincidence that women commented, "I lead two lives", and I am "two different people." Women are clearly aware of their need to carefully manage their outward appearances: how they look and how they are perceived, and to protect their privacy from societal gaze. They know that

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<sup>88</sup> The drawback to these strategies is that by using indirect methods to attain their goals, women do not gain status or self esteem (Lips 1991), and they are complicit actors in reproducing the prevailing gendered order of honourable behaviour that they are resisting. Yet because women are aware that they must live by the social rules, they feel they have limited options and continue to rely on strategies of preparing the ground, partial compliance, and fait accompli because they are not willing to risk personal and social consequences of their transgression.

<sup>89</sup> For an in-depth analysis on this topic refer to Sa'ar's (2001) study.

<sup>90</sup> For example, single women from the upper middle to upper class can discretely engage in sexual relationships when they invoke the strategy of partial compliance. They are aware of the risk of their family as well as their own social death. Yet, women from poor urban and rural areas don't fare as well, since they are aware of the risk of their own mortal death: being murdered in the name of honour.

although they live in the major city, Amman, they are not anonymous.<sup>91</sup> That they are defined through their fathers/husbands (Joseph 1994) strips them from any possibility of anonymity. Amira remarks how reputation affects her behaviour

[Reputation] is the most stupid concept – ACTUALLY it is the smartest concept – man ever created to control women in this society ... because all what they [people] need to do is to say one word about you – so that you are imprisoned in the house. No one has to prove anything – it's just THAT easy! .... [With regard to your] reputation – you need to be cautious. For example, [your mother may say] “I'm not going to allow you to go – because something might harm your reputation.” So it also has an affect on the FUTURE, on the PRESENT. It controls your life through time - THROUGH TIME and PLACE. Here – you live in fear for your reputation. In the West – if you are a normal person [an average citizen] you're not afraid of rumours. I mean if you're waiting on the street for a taxi, if the taxi is delayed – you are not afraid that someone would spread a rumour against you. I mean – for God's sake! (Amira).

By examining what women are saying, it is possible to determine to what extent women accept the social order imposed on them (Scott 1985). Amira's remark captures the powerful hold reputation has on women's lives.<sup>92</sup> Reputation controls women's lives through time and place. It affects their present and future life.

Because of their vulnerable positioning in society and within their family, and their need to maintain their family ties for their social survival, single women are aware that their actual positioning within their family is not fixed, rather, it can be manipulated according to the political interests of other family members, so as to maintain their control on them. Thus, women guard their social reputation vigilantly. They have a “factual acceptance” of the importance of

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<sup>91</sup>Living in an urban setting supposedly gains women more freedom through anonymity (Gordon 1994).

<sup>92</sup> It is important to keep in mind that men are also controlled by the fear of ruining their reputation, but the standards they have to live up to are different, since as I mentioned in chapter one, honour is gendered, hence, reputation is also gendered.



their reputation and have a “pragmatic resignation” to their honourable positioning (Scott 1985, 325). Failure to abide by the conventions of honour risks them being labelled immoral. Thus, family and society wield disciplinary power over women and acts as a societal gaze. Borrowing from Parla’s analogy, (2001, 82) the societal gaze is a suggestive metaphor of Foucault’s “normalizing gaze”, which functions as a “surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (Foucault 1979, 184). Moreover, reputation acts as a disciplinary power because

Disciplinary power ... imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection (Foucault 1979, 187).

## DOUBLE LIVES – DOUBLE IDENTITIES

Because society judges single women, they fear for their reputation and are forced to mask their true selves to protect their privacy. Women are angered that they are judged through the lens of being an honourable woman. They are critical of the social practice whereby the image society makes of them is based on a ready-made mould that they should fit into. If a woman fits into this mould she is considered honourable, and gains a good reputation. These women are annoyed because people interact with them on the basis of the image of who they are rather than their actual self. By leading double lives, women are actually engaging in a conspiracy of self-censorship, to protect their honourable reputation. Now I will briefly examine women’s need to lead double lives in order to protect their reputation (fuller details regarding their experience at work are in the section entitled *work and professional life*).



‘Anud refers to shifts in her personality. When she moves from the private into public arena, she changes her tone of voice, way of talking and body language. She expressed her anger at having to curtail her agency in public to maintain her honourable image. She is against the double standards where men can afford to be themselves and women cannot.

Another thing is that at work I can't be relaxed [be myself] – I have to be very professional. I am the type that likes to joke, have fun, play on words – but if I do that with a guy they will think I am loose [immoral]. So I cannot joke just with anybody.<sup>93</sup> I CANNOT, I cannot. On the other hand my male colleagues can do it at any time. Joking and playing is a wonderful way to make the work environment fun. But I cannot [restricts herself] (‘Anud).

Women have to be careful in the way they present themselves at work. They are very formal, and they wear a frown, otherwise men will think that they can make sexual remarks or innuendos. “I have to frown and give them THIS LOOK, or else I’ll lose my respectability”, said Diyala. “This look” is a common phrase that all women have referred to, as if it is imbued with magical qualities, and keeps men away.<sup>94</sup> They have to put aside a big part of who they are, keep their personal life and personal beliefs to themselves. As Su‘ad said: “You don't lie, but you don't show that you're different.” Women are forced to have a double identity, to wear a mask in order to be considered an honourable professional woman. Once they leave work, they can be themselves, particularly among their group of friends, *shilla*.

## PRESSURE TO MARRY

As noted earlier, until a woman gets married, her family and society remain obsessed by her conduct and reputation. For this reason, single women feel pressured to get married because it

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<sup>93</sup> As Antoun (1968) notes in his article, the Arabic language is rich and many words have double meaning, some are sexual in nature.

<sup>94</sup> Vieille (1978) refers to this notion in his article on Iranian women.

confers respectability, protection and honourable status. Single women are continuously bombarded with hints of marriage. For example, when they are with their parent's friends, they hear comments such as: "We have to get you married", "hello there you bride", "*Inshalla* (God willing) we'll marry you off." Jude said when she visits her family during the '*eid* (religious holiday) she encounters the same scenario

Every time they see me they pray for me ... Every '*eid* they spend it praying to God that I get married. *Ya 'ni* - like - *ya 'ni* I have Parkinson's disease and I need to be healed (Laughs).

She goes on to say that married women feel threatened to have her around their husbands, a finding that concurs with Gordon's (1994) study

I'm kind of this disease out there you know, in need to be controlled you know ... A condition - I'm a condition - which needs treatment through marriage. And I just take it I have to take it. My friends too ... it's just like - a pressure (Jude).

In Jude's case her singlehood was seen as a disease that needed a cure, as if she were abnormal. Single women are made to feel that they are incomplete. Family members feel it is their duty to put pressure on the single members of the family. For example, 'Anud's male cousin dropped by one day at her work to urge her to marry. As her cousin, he felt it was his duty to remind her that she should be thinking of marriage and not a career. However, she made it clear to him that she was exercising her agency and following through with her desire to establish her professional career

I said that I was not thinking of marriage. The whole issue is behind my back and that is where I plan to keep it. He said, "You'll be sorry." I was lucky because at that moment a colleague of mine came into the office. Any way my cousin is a lot older than me and already married. He was just coming to give me advice - you know - his duty as my cousin. He had a friend of his in mind for me - I gathered! ... But you know this

is a very delicate situation because he is my cousin. It is difficult to know how to word things when talking to him – because you don't want to hurt his feelings. It is a lot easier when dealing with strangers ('Anud).

As 'Anud stated, dealing with this kind of pressure is a delicate matter because she knows that her cousin means well, but he is intruding into her personal life. Yet marriage is not seen as a private matter in a communal society, it is a public matter. Colleagues at work also interfere. Many women said that they were unkindly teased by their male colleagues, and were told they should be more accommodating, and settle down like all the other normal women their age. The single women said they are labelled as *mu'aqqada*.<sup>95</sup>

Jude said that her boss, who is western educated,<sup>96</sup> interfered in her status as a single woman

My boss the first thing he asked me, he's graduated from abroad he's one of the most intelligent people I've met, he's like 'why... how come your parents don't nag you every day to get married?' He meant it as a compliment! You know – you know what I mean? It's sort of more like a compliment but it hurts. ... It's kind of embarrassing. But I laugh it off and – I am resilient but – it's all the time ... It makes me feel like I've sort of failed. That I'm incomplete, ... that I ... I'm – not perfect, that I'm missing something – that I'm second hand or second class compared to people who are married. That I'm sort of a failure as a woman because you know – I couldn't get myself a husband ... It bloody gets on my nerves, yes. It's just ... it's cruel" (Jude).

Jude illustrates the pervasiveness of the pressure on single women to marry. The majority of single women find it annoying and excessive. A few mentioned that they deliberately avoid

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<sup>95</sup> *Mu'aqqada* implies that a woman is uptight, tense, full of insecurities, suspecting of people's motives, and suspicious. Moreover, she has issues of jealousy of other women, is bitter, spiteful and sexually frustrated. The transliteral meaning in English is complex; yet, the essence of the meaning implies the notion of neurosis. The outcome of these labels is that the women feel they are lacking, incompetent with inherent deficiency. *Mu'aqqada* is analogous to the negative connotations associated with being an old maid. Gordon (1994) talks at length about the notion of old maid in her book.

<sup>96</sup> Implying that she expected him to act differently because of his exposure to western life.

certain social gatherings for that reason. For Jude, the social pressure on her to get married was so great that it caused her to become, in her words, "psychologically disturbed." She said, "They make you start feeling sorry for yourself because you'll end up alone." Depression and feelings of desperation to get married is a common thread among single women. They may not admit it, but they allude to it at various times throughout the interview.

When a woman lets her guard down, and puts aside her double identity, she risks being the centre of gossip. For example, several women complained that when they were seen talking to a male at work, rumour spread that they were involved in an affair. So, women have to be careful at work and maintain formal relationships with their male colleagues if they are to maintain their honourable reputation. Reem said a rumour circulated about her at work over a mosquito bite. The bite she said was interpreted as a man's pinch because her colleagues suspected that she might be involved in a relationship with a man behind their back. Reem complained that her colleagues' intentions were negative because she communicates comfortably with her male colleagues. She was not believed when she said she was not involved with anyone. Following that incident, Reem learned that her work environment is rife with gossip, so she meticulously guards her reputation. One reason why Reem is the centre of gossip at her work is because she is veiled. As a woman wearing the hijab, she is expected to behave in a very circumspect manner, avoiding contact with men unless it is absolutely necessary. Because of Reem's ease in communicating with her male colleagues and her need to do so given the demands of her job, she is shattering the stereotype of the honourable behaviour of a veiled woman.

Unfortunately, for many of the single women, gossip has undermined their sense of self-confidence because gossip has made them doubt their behaviour. It was not uncommon for single women to remark: "Perhaps I'm wrong. Maybe I should have tried harder" or "maybe I

should have acted differently with my male colleagues.” Gossip has caused women to feel that there is something wrong with them. Because of the pressure to maintain their honourable reputation, an unflattering rumour causes them to perceive themselves at fault. One single woman set out to foster a better relationship with the secretaries at her work since they instigated these rumours. She said that her endeavour paid off.

## WHAT IS *NASIB*?

Single women jokingly say, “my *nasib* has not arrived” (I am not fated or destined to marry). Implied in the notion of *nasib* are (a) fate/chance and (b) the divine will. *Nasib* stems from the socio-religious belief that whomever you marry is a fate decreed by *Allah*,<sup>97</sup> as opposed to being based on free choice. The notion has been used to push women into accepting their suitor even if he turns out to be irresponsible, a womaniser or abusive. Being told it is her *nasib*, a woman is expected to accept her destiny and regress into a state of passive agency. *Nasib* is also used to deter women from pre-marriage dating since it would be futile. The notion of *nasib* equals marriage in popular discourse. It has with time lost its more generic meaning related to fate and has been reduced to signify whom one is going to marry. Women are told to await their *nasib* since it constitutes the greatest and most important task in their lives. Diyala defines *nasib* as

You do everything within your means to have your dream materialize – but there is a hidden power – and I believe it is the divine power – it plays a role – either this thing is yours or not. I don’t mean that I kick back and relax and wait until it comes to me. No this is not what I mean. What I mean is that I tried – and in the end it turns out that it is not for me. So I try to make it easier on myself and say, “There is no *nasib* (luck).” I think it is destiny. Every culture defines it differently.

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<sup>97</sup> *Nasib* implies that one’s life is determined by chance (external control) and God’s will, rather than an individual having direct/internal control over one’s life. The element of being patient is implied.

Jordanian women meet their *nasib* the traditional way. Where men or their mothers go in search of potential brides. I refer to this as the practice of “bride shopping.” Most single women find it degrading, insulting and unacceptable. They are made to feel like an item on display or a merchandise to be examined and compared to other goods. Moreover, they resent that the suitor is not interested in who they are but in their outer appearance and their family name.

I mean the guy comes from the States with a list of names on it [of potential brides] and he goes around to their houses to check them out. And I am number seven on the list and he comes over to my mom to look over the goods – this idea I will not accept 100%. ... [It] is like he is examining and comparing goods from 15 shops ('Anud).

When men or their mothers go shopping for brides, it is based on a woman's *asl* and *nasab* (her family of origin and descent).<sup>98</sup> As Rula stated, "I worked on myself. I want [him] to appreciate ME for who I AM."

Although most of the single women are against the notion of traditional arranged marriages, a few admit it does work. For example, it is acceptable for a single woman to meet a potential mate through her links and network of friends, rather than the traditional manner where the man or his mother go to her house. Meeting one's *nasib* through friends is another way of finding out more about the *nasib*'s character and background

The way to meet a man is always in a round about way. ... You meet a man when you are going out in a big group of boys and girls to have dinner together. ... You meet the second time ... in the same way. Then after that both can meet face to face. Therefore, definitely the way to meet a man is through a specific link. Also I think we are more cautious than westerners. If you don't know a person's background you remain afraid of him [sceptical] – you think that maybe he is playing a game.

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<sup>98</sup> An individual's honourable status is related to one's descent and lineage (Bourdieu 1977; Rosander 1997).

But if you feel there is a link [connection with others] – you feel more secure that he is not playing or has ulterior motives. When I meet someone through a mutual friend – this friend is my security like my bodyguard – even though that [may] not really [be] the case. I think it is more psychological – a psychological type of security. In the end we remain a tribal society. In a sense that mutual person [link] acts as our security [blanket]. As a tribal society if a non-related tribal member attacks us, our tribe goes to our rescue. This has been with us since the time [of] *Jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic times) and is perhaps in our genes by now. So you feel more secure knowing that there is a mutual person ('Anud).

'Anud is an example of a conservative woman who refused to date. In her mind, any relationship a single woman establishes with a man is based on the premise that it will lead to marriage. Dating for fun<sup>99</sup> implies a lack of intention for marriage. Furthermore, having a boyfriend automatically implies that a woman is engaging in sex thus ruining her reputation and her parents'.<sup>100</sup> For example, the only reason Diyala would go out on a date is if she meets a man who she is convinced will be suitable as a partner, and her parents approve.

Nahla, another conservative woman, refuses to date. She argues that eventually a boyfriend will break up with his girlfriend, and they become strangers. She is against the idea that a person who will eventually become a stranger has intimate-personal knowledge about her life. Paradoxically, Nahla dresses very provocatively by wearing skin-tight clothes: tight fitting shining black lycra leggings and a knit top revealing her bodily curves. Her dress code belies her traditional beliefs in gender relations. Nahla went on to say that she is against including any stipulations in her marriage contract although Islam gives the woman the right to put conditions. She is against having the right to divorce her husband, known in Arabic as *al-'isma*. She claims that it is only the man's prerogative because she is an eastern woman. As an eastern woman, if she has the

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<sup>99</sup> Or, for the sake of dating.

<sup>100</sup> I will further explore this matter in the next chapter.



right to divorce her future husband that means that she is stripping him of his manhood, and she cannot accept doing that. To her an eastern woman is one who operates within a certain framework and knows her limits. She is *muhafiza* (conservative), protects and safeguards herself, alluding to her modesty, chastity and virginity.

An eastern woman is one who knows she has limits and operates within a certain framework. We must respect religion and cultural traditions – we have strong family bonds that we live up to. .... Religious ethics are important because religion is the backbone to everything. We will always have our limits no matter how educated we become and how exposed we are to western culture. These limits are very important especially to eastern women because they ensure her dignity and value (Nahla).

Dana dresses very conservatively, yet her behaviour is unconventional. She did not seek her parents' approval to marry her boyfriend. She also decided to forgo the cultural tradition of *tulbeh*, when a group of notable men from the potential groom's side approaches the woman's father and notable men in her family to ask for her hand in marriage.

See – when you work in the field that I do you realize that all of this is a waste of time – empty talk (Dana).

Since she doesn't believe in certain cultural practices and finds them a waste of time, Dana chose to exercise her agency and make her wishes known. She chose not to have a wedding reception, which to her was an unnecessary expense, and planned to use that money for her honeymoon. Dana and Nahla represent the majority of single women I interviewed. I refer to this group as "conservative women" because of the inconsistencies between their outer appearance/practice and their responses/attitudes. The contradictions reflects their conflation of local traditions with religious values and norms, and their attempt to forge a modernized version



of their cultural values to fit in with their exposure to western ideals. “Islamist women” were the second largest group and “liberal women” were the minority.<sup>101</sup>

Hana, a 26-year-old liberal woman, said that if she reaches 40 and is still single, she wants to leave the country. As a single woman living with her parents, she is unable to lead an independent life, including the possibility of having sexual relations. She is forced to live a different lifestyle to that which she has in mind. Raya, who is nearing her mid 30s, says she feels she is no longer desirable in the eyes of prospective suitors. She is told that she is too old, like a drooping violet, indicative of society’s discriminatory attitude towards older single women. To reach 40 and still be single means their situation is serious, and marriage is not a possibility. Furthermore, single women from conservative backgrounds do not want to live under the mercy of a brother, since they are expected to live with him and his wife, or be under their watchful eye.<sup>102</sup>

A large number of conservative single women expressed the desire to live on their own but have not acted on their wishes. They realise that it is impossible because it is scandalous for their parents, and their parents would consider their move a personal rejection and be hurt. Most of them said that moving out is not worth the trouble. Only one liberal woman moved out using the *fait accompli* strategy. The two single Islamist women I interviewed are content with their living arrangements. They would only consider moving out if they were to marry. None of the single women interviewed, except two lawyers, were aware of Article 165 in the personal status law that stipulates that a father can call back his virgin daughter to live under his roof at any time

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<sup>101</sup> My results corroborate the study by Freij and Sawalha (2001). As I will show in the next two chapters, Islamist and liberal women have consistent views and seem to have the least amount of discrepancy, similar to the aforementioned study.

<sup>102</sup> This finding corroborates the studies of Shami and Taminian (1990) and Shukri (1996) on low-income Jordanian working women.

until she reaches the age of 40. The law is based on the cultural belief that women over 40 are asexual and no longer considered seductive, and on the Qur'anic verse (24: 60) that implies a relaxation of the modesty code for women past the childbearing age (Antoun 1968; Mernissi 1987a).

## WORK AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Dodd (1973, 54) argues "employment outside the home is an activity that runs counter to the norms of the *'ird* code", and for middle and upper class women staying at home denotes their social status and respectability (Keddie and Beck 1978). Now, as the number of middle and upper class professional women is rising,<sup>103</sup> there is a need to examine their experiences because socio-cultural beliefs are against women's entry into the public arena (see chapter one). The following section will examine how women navigate through what was previously an exclusive male territory, work in the private and public sectors. The main questions I will explore are how single professional career women communicate their respectability, modesty, and virtuousness in the public realm and what practices they use to offset any notion of questionable reputability?

In addition to assuming a double identity, women at work deliberately remain silent rather than provoke someone's anger.<sup>104</sup> They do not want to become the target of other people's gossip. Therefore, it is no coincidence that women resort to the tactic of diminishing their accomplishments by describing their work as "so-so" and "not so good." By assuming a low profile, they guard their reputation from being labelled "arrogant", "uppity" and "self-conceited", labels associated with dishonourable behaviour.

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<sup>103</sup> Statistical data on Jordanian women's employment in professional jobs according to their socio-economic status is lacking.

<sup>104</sup> According to Fordham (1993), Goldberger (1996, 345) notes that silence is a strategy women adopt so as not to draw other's attention to them. By maintaining their silence, they protect themselves.

Single women are conscious that people tend to personalise issues at work. When they make a critical remark related to general issues at work, many times these comments are perceived as a personal attack on the person they are talking with. Thus, women have to be careful if they make a critical remark, because they cannot afford to have enemies.

In Jordan you can't criticize someone's work because it affects your personal relationship with them and I hate that – because work is different. I like to separate that – and when I do criticize – I offend people (Jude).

Jude is articulating women's need to create a distinction between professional and personal matters. However, the issue at heart is more complicated than that. Single women want to be judged at work according to their professional conduct and performance, and not their sexual morality. When matters are personalized, the line between the personal and professional are blurred, and a woman's moral ethics and her sexuality are substituted for her professional competence and performance. What women are saying is "if you insist on judging me at work, then base it on my professional and not personal conduct." Thus, women are advocating an alternative understanding of one's professional reputation, by dividing their reputation into two categories: moral reputation, and work reputation. By insisting on separating their professional performance from their sexuality, they are reclaiming control over their moral/sexual agency, and placing it squarely into their own hands. They are stripping society from controlling their hymenization.

Women also experience male resistance upon their entry into male dominated fields since they are perceived as upsetting the traditional gender hierarchy (Jansen 1998; Mernissi 1987b), and it is not uncommon for them to hear a disparaging remark here and there. For example, a young woman who works in a prestigious post in the government was told by a male colleague "I hope

you were not bored at the meeting, maybe next time you want to bring with you some crochet.” As a professional woman, she was not taken seriously, and her colleague did not respect her education or her professional expertise. When women stand up for their rights, assert their opinions and challenge male authority, they are labelled aggressive, *mu‘aqqada* and trouble-makers. The portrayal of normal traits as a warped behaviour is a mechanism of social control to silence women and keep them in their place (Lips 1991). These labels are uttered by conservative men, and by the so-called “progressive” western educated men, who have turned traditional upon their return to Jordan.<sup>105</sup> When female members of the royal family assert their opinions, no one labels them as being aggressive. Yet, when educated women are hired by the royal family to manage the daily affairs of the Royal non-government organisations<sup>106</sup> (RNGOs), they are not spared the label of being aggressive or trouble-makers. The women hired by the royal family are caught in the discrepancy between the state sponsored image of women as assertive and the reality of their experience.

PEJW stated that work is both rewarding and frustrating.<sup>107</sup> By the word fulfilling women meant that they are able to excel, exercise their agency, tap into their potential and self-actualise. As Jude said, “My work is vital because it allows me to be someone outside my family.” Yet, because they are not taken seriously, assumed to lack intellectual capability and perceived as irrational, they are extremely frustrated. As Jansen (1988) notes, part of women’s frustration is related to their new freedoms, which conflict with the traditional identity of women.

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<sup>105</sup> Seikaly (1997, 132) reports similar findings among Bahraini women.

<sup>106</sup> RNGOs are royal non-government organizations. These are NGOs whose patrons are members of the royal family. I discuss this in chapter five.

<sup>107</sup> Sabbagh (1997) and Jansen (1998) noted similar experience among working Jordanian women.

Work is the centre of SPEJW's lives because it makes up for the absence of a relationship with a significant partner. For many SPEJW, their professional life has taken over from their family life, which contradicts Gordon's (1994) findings.<sup>108</sup> According to Gordon, western single women are able to create a distinction between their family life and professional life. Perhaps this is because western single women are able to live on their own, and are able to have more control over their lives, whereas Jordanian single women have to live with their families, and consequently have less control over their lives.

Women are reminded of their gender at work. For example, Su'ad's first job was with the Arab Bank. She was treated as a glorified secretary rather than a qualified professional with expertise in her field and could only wear traditional feminine attire. The bank environment ensured that the gender roles were strictly enforced, reflecting the society's traditional view regarding women. Yet, when women wore skirts to work, they were irritated

At work ... I mean if I'm wearing a skirt I'm conscious of people gazing at my – legs. If you're wearing anything a little bit [revealing] - immediately their eyes go to [t]here – you get used to it but it's like this constant intrusion – you know (Jude).

Staring is so intense that some women consider it a form of sexual harassment. Jude represents other women's sentiments when she stated that the male gaze was unbearable. Most women complained that the experience was not only aggravating but humiliating as well.

Staring, constant staring – to the point that it wears you down - kind of eats at your bones from the inside. However much they see you everyday, day in and out, every time you pass by the corridor, they continuously stare at you – even if they see you like every second – again the same stare is the same – like you

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<sup>108</sup> Gordon studied the lives of western single women in Helsinki, London and San Francisco. Furthermore, Flynn and Oldham (1999, 68) noted that single Jordanian women work about six and one half more hours than married women.

know – you are not a human being – you are a woman per se'. They look at your clothes – how you walk – you're like – constantly watched. They don't just let you [pass] by. You can't just walk by once in the corridor without one just staring at you. And – it drives you BANANAS. ... And it just kills you – because you're so aware of it - you're tired. And I know they don't mean it – but they don't give a damn. It still kills me. I'm on the stairs – they watch your every move. You go to the bathroom – everyone watches you go out and that's it – it's unbearable. So I guess that's the worse harassment you get. [You want to tell them] that's enough – just get away from me – get away from me – leave me alone. You just want to walk with no one even paying attention (Jude).

Because of the male gaze and societal gaze, women are constantly worried about their appearance. They talked about tugging on their skirts and dresses to make them longer when they sit down and checking their clothes for fear they forgot to button their blouse or zip up their trousers. They resented the idea that every man felt he had the right to scrutinise them. Many felt the gaze reduced them to sex objects and caused them to feel very uncomfortable with their body, as if their body were a burden (Al-Ali 1994). Some women described the gaze as if they were being stripped naked.<sup>109</sup> Others were made to feel that their body is shameful.<sup>110</sup> Mernissi (1987a) explains Imam's Al-Ghazali analysis of the power of the male gaze in this manner:

The eye is undoubtedly an erogenous zone in the Muslim structure of reality, just as able to give pleasure as the penis. A man can do as much damage to a woman's honour with his eyes as if he were to seize hold of her with his hands (p. 141)

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<sup>109</sup> I heard this comment when I met with women for the interview on a one-to-one basis and for the focus group. They would arrive at our destined meeting place exasperated and furious at the way men stared at them while they were coming over. They disliked the manner in which they were sexualised and objectified.

<sup>110</sup> This was uttered by both secularly dressed women and veiled women. The latter said that one of the reasons that pushed them to veil is their abhorrence of the male gaze: fixated mainly on their chest and legs.

Al-Ghazali described the male gaze as “the look is fornication of the eye”<sup>111</sup> (Mernissi 1987a, 141). It is no wonder that a few women alluded to the male-gaze as an “eye fuck.” It is obvious that women are tired of the double gaze: the male gaze and societal gaze. By being constantly watched, women feel they have to constantly look over their shoulders and they feel claustrophobic. As Reem said: “It follows you everywhere. They know your every move.” One woman wished she could throw a blanket over herself to render her invisible when she is in the public eye. As a result, women’s attire is a public affair, where what a woman wears affects the way society perceives her and her family. Thus, a woman is dressing for others and not herself.

Returning to the issue of the challenges women face at work, Logan and Huntley (2001) illustrate that gendered power relations have been normalised. Consequently, women in positions of power face a host of challenges from both men and women. For example, Suha complained that the secretaries challenge her positional power by refusing to follow through on her requests <sup>112</sup> They claim that they will only take orders from the boss; implying they are having difficulty with Suha’s power and are disclaiming her authority as a mid-level female manager. The secretaries’ gender and sexual ideology at work are threatened in the presence of a female boss (Logan and Huntley 2001). On a similar note, while Marian and her brother are partners in their business, some people perceive her as “just helping out her brother.” This reflects societal attitudes regarding traditional gender roles and the socio-cultural barriers towards women’s entry into what is predominantly thought of being the male domain. To capture the difficulty men have with women in powerful positions, I will relate Marian’s experience in the southern city of Rumanna,<sup>113</sup> where she was contracted to complete a job.

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<sup>111</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Revivification of Religious Sciences*, Cairo, n.d. p. 35

<sup>112</sup> Bradley (1999) notes similar findings.

<sup>113</sup> Fictitious name.



Rumanna is a small town, mainly inhabited by settled tribes in Southern Jordan. Because of its archaeological heritage, the town became more modernised, yet, gender roles and gender relations remained unchanged. When Marian arrived at the work site, the male labourers, who were locals, initially refused to follow her orders because they didn't think she was capable, qualified or knowledgeable. To these men, Marian had transgressed the traditional order

At the beginning it was very difficult. They [male workers] would look at me with eyes questioning my knowledge or they would try to look for a male architect. When I was on my own working on the project in Rumanna – the workers would listen to what I said – but wouldn't do anything. When I would ask them why they didn't follow through – they would say that they didn't believe that I was capable of handling the project. Or – they would go back to the male engineer. The second day he would have figured out what had happened and would tell the workers that they should have consulted me and not him. Now they listen to me. ... I go through this with every new project – I expect it [even if it is in Amman]. I try not to get upset because I know they don't know any better. This is the atmosphere [background] they came from. Even though inside I get very upset – I sit down and think – but this is how they are raised and then I try to show them that there are other ways to deal with this [issue of gender relations] (Marian).

Marian is mindful of men's difficulty accepting her as a boss. She is conscious that men from rural or poor urban areas are still not used to seeing women outside of their traditional domain. She has learned to accept this, and turns every new work situation into an opportunity to show that there are alternative gender relations in which men and women can maintain their honourable position. She said that after the men in Rumanna became accustomed to her, they would come and talk to her about work issues and personal issues. What Marian points out is important. Changes in gender roles take time. Her story illustrates the powerful point Bourdieu



makes about habitus, that it is shaped by one's objective conditions of material existence,<sup>114</sup> and that habitus directs our practice (Bourdieu 1977).

Whereas Marian was able to establish a more casual relationship with men she worked with, Hana could not. She had to maintain formal relationships with men, to maintain her high standards of work. Hana has a non-traditional female career. She is comfortable interacting with men, but the majority of men with whom she deals are uncomfortable working with her.<sup>115</sup> She maintains a formal relationship with them, so that they would, in her words, "*yahsibu hisabi*." This is a common idiom in Arabic implying that men will take her seriously, attach importance to her and will not over step their boundaries.<sup>116</sup> "You have to", she stressed, "especially being a woman in this country and dealing with this type of mentality, be extra cautious." She mentioned that if she were to become more casual, men who work for her would take advantage of the lack of formality and not work according to the standards that she demands. She is also cognisant that men do not take her professional career seriously. To make her point, she stopped working with four businesses and took her business elsewhere.

A theme emerged among the single women who work in RNGOs, state institutions, universities and public offices. All complained of problems of jealousy. Upon closer examination, what emerged is the desire of colleagues to undermine their hard work, because colleagues believed they had no room to excel if SPEJW dominated the scene. The colleagues of the single women I

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<sup>114</sup> He means that individuals are influenced by many factors including socio-economic status, class, educational background and other issues. He is trying to stress the importance of contextualising and grounding an individual's behaviour in their current environment that they have been socialized into and has become a part of them.

<sup>115</sup> Like Marian the majority of the men she works with are from rural or poor urban areas.

<sup>116</sup> *Yahsib hisabi* also means in colloquial Arabic to be taken into account or to be considered.

interviewed were threatened by their dedication to work, their high standards of performance, and their boss's regard. These women experienced subtle forms of sabotage

When I first started working – I noticed that there was a group who tried to clip your wings when you are proving yourself as effective and successful in your work. And when you become recognized for your hard work and efforts – there is a group of people who are not pleased by your progress – perhaps they consider you as a threat to them. What saddens me is that I'm not taking away anything from anyone – we all have different things to contribute ... I have a responsibility a job to do ... I am not meant to sit in my post and latch on to it – neither growing nor allowing my work to progress. Or whenever a new person starts – I should not worry that they are going to take my post away from me. Work is about continuity. Each person continues the work of his/ her predecessor (Suha).

Suha is conveying the point that the backbiting and sabotage she experienced at work is related to people feeling threatened by her job performance. She said that they perceived their jobs to be insecure because they were probably hired through *wasta* and not because of their professional competency. Suha went on to say that her colleagues couldn't wait for her to make a mistake. They capitalized on it; spread rumours through the grapevine to make sure that the boss would find out about it. In addition, they made it a point that "they would never make a similar mistake", stressing that the mistake was a case of negligence on Suha's part. Their intention was to convey to the administration that their good work was overlooked. In the minds of her colleagues, she overshadowed them and received all the credit without giving them the chance to excel. The saboteurs felt they deserved to be in the limelight. This is not a simple case of jealousy; rather it is a consequence of two inter-related factors: an educational system that encourages rote-based learning memory, rather than critical thinking,<sup>117</sup> (MOP and UNDP 2000,

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<sup>117</sup> This issue was debated by the Economic Consultative Council (ECC) nine months after King Abdullah acceded to the throne, when he called for the first national economic forum, known as the Dead Sea Retreat. The meeting adopted a set of recommendations that sought to propel the economy, improve living standards, improve education, reduce poverty and spur growth rates.

50; UNDP 2002); and an authoritarian /hierarchical system that encourages one person to be the decision maker and the rest to be followers (Al-Abbadi 1982; Kavar 1997). However, according to the female participants, the two contributing factors to their problems at work are *wasta* and *mahsubiyya* (nepotism and patronage) and uncontested GPD.

According to all participants, and a recent study *Wasta — The Declared Secret* the practice of *wasta* is deeply rooted across society (Kilani and Sakijha 2002). It has failed to foster a meritocracy. There seems to be little knowledge of standards of professional conduct, or of what it means to be service oriented.<sup>118</sup> In addition, the element of fear for one's job plays a hidden role. The majority of employees in the public sector know that they can be easily transferred to a meaningless job in a remote area or to an insignificant department, so they try to protect their positive image at work. The minute they have an opportunity to prove they are better, like when a colleague makes a mistake, they act.

As for the notion of uncontested male privilege, the majority of employees are unaccustomed to seeing hard working, enthusiastic and energetic professional women, who see beyond the day-to-day exegesis of work<sup>119</sup> (Al-Hindawi 1998; El Kharouf 2000). These professional women are not just entering the male domain but are challenging men because of their competency and zeal (Sabbagh 1997).

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<sup>118</sup> See round table discussion in Sakijha and Sa'eda, Eds. (2000). Also, King Abdullah II is aware of this and has made several incognito visits to various government offices disguised as a poor man, or an invalid as shown on local TV and reported in the Arabic and English daily press.

<sup>119</sup> Very few women are in decision-making position. Perhaps one of the few jobs where women seem to be in positions of power are RNGOS. There may be individuals who might argue that this practice is merely a window dressing by the royal family who want to portray themselves as modern. Yet in a conservative society, an easy place to start promoting women to positions in power with no contestation is in RNGOS.

In a hierarchical society (Joseph 1994b) individuals are rated on a scale of most important to least important according to where they fall on this social ladder. This social structure has affected the way everyone perceives her/himself, i.e. who is superior or inferior to her/him. However, it is a double blow for women because of the societal view of women as inferior to men. This social hierarchy is daily reproduced in the lives of men and women in Jordan, making it difficult for women to extricate themselves from this hierarchical structure.

For some women being in public spaces unaccompanied by a male guardian means they are sexually available to men, giving men licence to approach them. I will quote at length just how such an incident took place, and the woman's creative strategy to put the man in his place

Jude: I was getting into a lift – and this kind of VIP person ... who's way high up you know, but really it doesn't really matter because he could still be a low life. So – he was in the elevator and I was outside the elevator and – I was like, [she said when the elevator door opened on her floor] "Excuse me are you going up or down?" So he was like [answered her by saying]: "I swear to God, even if I were going up I would go down for you." I just thought [to myself] that was a kind of harassment because he didn't know me and he was obviously trying to flirt with me and it was sick because he was like as repulsive as a toad. So I thought okay how am I going to get [back at him] because (a) – he's a very high official and you know he works with me and (b) he knows my father so I can't like tell him where to go, you know. So how am I going to handle it, so I did it in a really funny way and it shows you how weird our culture is and how thick it is. So I got in and said: "‘ammo (uncle) you don't know me?" And he had this really evil smile you know [as if saying to himself] *ah she responded* and I (said): "I'm blah, blah, blah's daughter 'ammo." When I called him 'ammo, he knew who I was [and I thought] he felt like throwing up.

Leah: You called him 'ammo?

Jude: Yeah I was like [I said] 'ammo you don't know me, I'm the daughter of so and so'. Immediately he was so embarrassed because – you know he knew that I was like you know – his daughter and he knew my dad so he was afraid. And he was

ashamed because – this is not some flimsy bimbo whatever, this is like the daughter of someone of a good family. ... But look how weird -- he turned, he couldn't even look at me any more! ... So suddenly he was really, really gallant. Suddenly when he knows who you are and there's this tribal part in it and all of a sudden you are tribal related or society related then you become like someone that he would [have to] protect. And I'm just like -- I knew how to get back at him. I did it so subtly and he felt so bad, I mean he just – he left and couldn't see in front of him [too embarrassed]. It was better than telling him you know something, you're a creep.

Jude invoked the fictive kin strategy to shame him (Joseph 1999a, 1997b). Her remark reminded him that, by being related to her and her extended family, it was his duty to protect her (Abu-Lughod 1986). By making a pass at her, he was failing to live up to his manly duty, and dishonouring himself. He not only disgraced himself in her eyes, but in the eyes of his extended family. As an honourable woman, she could seek retribution by telling her father, who would demand a formal apology. The fictive uncle would have to ask the dignitaries in his extended family (*jaha*)<sup>120</sup> to request forgiveness from her father in an act that is known as a *sulha*<sup>121</sup> (act of reconciliation). So, by invoking the status of 'ammo on him, she implied that he lost face in the eyes of the public (Feghali 1997). Jude was able to use the discourse of honour in her favour and claim her honourable status by dishonouring him.

## CAUGHT BETWEEN FAMILY, SOCIETY AND STATE

To illustrate the interconnectedness of the private and public sphere for professional Jordanian women I chose to focus on the work experiences of three women: Rula, Amira and Muna. As stated earlier, one major source of frustration for women is the continued practice of *wasta*. It is

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<sup>120</sup> The word *jaha* originates from *wujaha* meaning a front/face. *Jaha* refers to a group of male dignitaries, usual the notable elders of extended families, who represent a person and speak on their behalf.

<sup>121</sup> *Sulha* – in Arabic means peace making. Literally it means to bring about a cease-fire. For an in-depth discussion on this matter see Al-Abbadi 1982.

so widely practiced and bureaucratically entrenched that it is part of people's daily practice and is inescapable, linking women's personal family life with their public life. Rula, like many women in the study, was hired at her job, with the help of her father by *wasta*. Her dedication, professionalism and high productivity at work threatened her male colleagues who claimed that she was naïve. This was done to undermine her and make her appear incompetent, so that they could control her. To make matters worse, her immediate supervisor was also threatened. He resorted to character assassination by spreading rumours about her: "She is too demanding", "she frightens people away", and "is uncooperative." It is also probable that her colleagues did not know how to deal with a dynamic and outgoing female colleague. Thus, Rula was attacked not for her professional dedication, but for who she is as a person.

Rula also had to deal with the social pressures related to what she called tribalism. Walid, a transfer student from a State University, who needed to obtain an equivalency for the courses he took, approached Rula. From the outset he said, "I just would like to point out to you that we are related". She asked him "how so?" He said, "Because we are from the same home town. I am from Mirza,<sup>122</sup> so give me a break, and boost my grade while you're assessing the equivalency of my work." Walid manipulated his fictive kinship status to make her feel guilty by implying that she was morally obliged to help him. He expected that because he was from her hometown, Rula would give him special privileges and boost his grades.

Walid did poorly in the exam, and the best grade that Rula could give him was 42/100. He tried to cajole her into giving him a passing grade, but she wouldn't. When his plea failed, he summoned his family who approached her the next day at her office. She told the parents that she would not change their son's grade to a passing mark since he did not deserve it. Walid's

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<sup>122</sup> Fictitious name.

family knew her father, so they started calling up her parents, trying to embarrass and shame them into putting pressure on Rula. Rula's father told them that she had an independent mind and would act in the student's best interest.

A few months passed and Rula found out that her maternal aunt, a teacher in Mirza, was denied promotion and received an unfair job evaluation. Apparently, Walid's sister was a school director where Rula's maternal aunt taught. When it was time for Rula's aunt yearly step promotion, her aunt was given a mark of good for her yearly professional performance, rather than excellent. This gradation precluded her aunt's promotion and set her back two years. When her aunt inquired about her mark, she was told by the director, "This is so next time your niece will think twice before she will fail my brother in his university course." Rula stood up for what she believed in as an individual, and exercised her agency. Yet, her individual beliefs clashed with the communal belief. Because she refused to engage in *wasta*, and help out her town folk, she insulted them.<sup>123</sup> Power relations were personalized when Rula refused to succumb to Walid's family social pressure (Joseph 1997b). In this account, both men and women were reminded of the almost impossible task of separating the personal from the professional because of the strong linkages between them (Joseph 2001). This example illustrates the complex interconnected nature of connectivity, *wasta*, state institution, public and personal life.

Amira, a 24-year-old veiled single woman, works in an international organization. She was standing with her boss and a delegation of Jordanian MPs. Her colleague, a man in his early 50s, had just returned from a long holiday and was excited to be back at work and happy to see Amira.

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<sup>123</sup> Or it can be argued that Rula's refusal was considered a personal insult to Walid's family – a direct attack on their family honour - requiring them to take pre-emptive retaliatory measures (Al-Abbadi 1982).



This one colleague of mine – a Jordanian – he was off ... on vacation – poor guy – he is [simple]– anyway I was standing with my boss and MPs – all Jordanians. He came and yelled “Amira, hi” – and he hugged me – [she exclaims] up to here OK – [and goes on to say] but [then] he kissed me on both my cheeks in front of all these people – all of whom are Jordanians I mean I am veiled. If my parents knew about what happened they would not allow me to enter into my work institution. One of the MPs thought I was loose – we were in the elevator going up and he put his hand on my waist. I was mortified! I didn’t want to make a scene. So I quickly rushed out of the elevator. I mean all those who work at the organization have long tongues [gossip] – so I filed for sexual harassment [against my colleague] because he should have known better. But I know ... he meant well, but he shouldn’t have done that – because that MP [who put his hand on her waist] is an asshole. My colleague – didn’t know how much damage he caused me through his action. I mean in front of a delegation – he kissed me (Amira).

Although Musa is Jordanian, he forgot the cultural taboos because he worked all his life in an international organization and was exposed to western norms of personal interactions. To Musa, greeting a female colleague by giving her a peck on her cheek was socially acceptable within the confines of his work. However, his conduct is taboo outside the organization’s boundaries. Signs of affection are restricted to specific close relatives. His behaviour in the presence of the Jordanian MPs was inappropriate. By kissing Amira on the cheek, Musa inadvertently signalled to the MPs that Amira was dishonourable and immoral. It is plausible that the MP who touched Amira believed that women are sexually uncontrollable, and given Musa’s actions, decided to check out his luck.<sup>124</sup> Amira did not react in the elevator for several reasons. Firstly, Musa had put her in a compromising position. The kiss marked her as an immoral woman, and shamed all her male relatives and family members. Secondly, if she had complained, since the MP was a state official, the government would be implicated. Thirdly, since customary law takes precedence, her complaint would have meant that this official would have to go with several

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<sup>124</sup> For an in-depth discussion regarding societal attitudes regarding women’s sexuality in the Arab world see Antoun (1968); Memissi (1982, 1987a, 1991); Sabbah (1984).



male dignitaries (*jaha*) to ask her father for forgiveness (*sulha*) because of his breach of conduct. Although Amira did not do anything wrong, the cultural interpretation of Musa's act construes Amira as the culprit and not the victim. Fourthly, once Amira's father and her male relatives were told the story, they would realize that Amira had shamed the family honour. If her family were very traditional, there was a remote possibility that she might be a victim of crimes of honour. Other possibilities ranged from her parents forcing her to quit her work to being reprimanded. If she were lucky, she might be told to be careful in the future. Although Amira was an innocent player, because the stakes were so high, she felt compelled to take the role of a passive agent.

Muna's experience was still more traumatic. Muna, a health professional, works for the MOH (Ministry Of Health) during the day, and in the afternoon, runs her private clinic. Through her work with the ministry, she noted a gap in the healthcare services for school children. She devised a treatment program that, if implemented, would improve the school children's health and prevent them from developing serious medical problems in the future. When she discussed the project with her immediate supervisor, he responded that there was no reason for this project. So she bargained with him and said, "I'll get all the material, I won't bother you with those details – just approve the time I need to implement the project." Her boss agreed as long as she got the approval from his supervisor, the general-manager. Eventually, her immediate supervisor informed her that the general-manager would not support the project. She insisted on knowing the reason and was told again that it was a headache. So she argued her point until she was given their approval, on the condition that she would secure outside funding. Muna said, "I think he approved my study because deep down he didn't believe that I could secure the funding. He was implying that he was doing me a favour by allowing me to do the study." She said that he was indirectly portraying himself to her and others as being thoughtful and accommodating, and that

by doing her a favour, he was sending her a message that she was indebted to him for his generosity and willingness to accommodate her project. In this manner, he maintained the GPD.

Muna also approached the MOH headquarters and obtained their approval, also on the condition that it would not cost the government any money. She agreed and wrote a proposal for funding and assistance in kind, targeting international voluntary organizations. She secured both forms of assistance through a local branch of an international NGO, Lexicon.<sup>125</sup> While her immediate boss appeared to support her, actually he undermined and sabotaged her work by delaying, by not communicating adequately with the schools, and by withholding some information. For example, her boss claimed that he could not find an immediate replacement for her, and when one was found, that person would show up an hour or two late. When she complained to her boss, he would label her a “trouble-maker.” Given that government work hours are from 8 am - 2 pm,<sup>126</sup> she was left with a few hours every day to implement the project.

The project required the use of medical equipment, which required transport to the schools. Every time she requested help with transportation, she was told that all the vehicles were in use. Her boss stalled the transfer of equipment for over a month. She realized her boss’s game and found an alternative method of transportation, borrowing her friend’s truck. When she finally managed to get started with the project, the nursing assistant she was promised was no longer available, and the only person her boss could offer her was a secretary. Every time she went to the schools, a different secretary would accompany her. This slowed down her work, because it meant that she needed to train a new person each time. Her boss’s excuse was that he could not disrupt the work in his department by consistently taking from the same unit. Interestingly, her

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<sup>125</sup> Fictitious name.

<sup>126</sup> Before the official change in working hours and the working days in late spring of the year 2000.

boss would refer to the project as “Muna’s project”, as if the project was not affiliated with the MOH. His remark shows his difficulty with Muna assuming an active role at work.

Muna had three months in which to finish the project since it was spring and the scholastic year was coming to an end. Over a month was lost before Muna was able actually to start the project. When she finally arrived at the school, she noticed that the schoolteachers were unhappy about the inconvenience this project would cause them. Upon arrival at the school, she was asked to report immediately to the school headmistress, who told her

I know that when you initially told me about your project I encouraged you to do it. [Muna comments sarcastically] “Everyone thank God encourages me.” [The principal goes on to say] but our people are backwards. All the students’ parents have been calling, complaining that you are setting up an experiment on them.<sup>127</sup> The telephones have not stopped ringing since last night. And this morning I received a call from the Ministry of Education to prevent you from conducting your study.

Then the principal told her “forget the story [project] all together. The rumours are that nobody wants you to do this work. And you are creating unnecessary work for yourself.”

Muna had talked the day before to the headmistress, who informed her that they were expecting her. Later, Muna found out that her boss had failed to communicate properly and coordinate the necessary information between the ministries involved.<sup>128</sup> Although the MOH headquarters gave their approval, verbally and not in writing, the bureaucratic red tape was set into motion by her

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<sup>127</sup> It is very possible that the school principal misinformed the parents perhaps because she herself was not fully informed, even though Muna did verbally explain to her the project. Unfortunately, the MOH and Muna failed to send the school a written account of the project. Another possibility is that the principal deliberately twisted the information to scare the parents because she did not want to be inconvenienced by the disruptions the project would cause. Thus, her strategy was to appear helpful, when in fact she was sabotaging Muna’s efforts. A third possibility is that Muna’s boss talked with the school principal and they devised a strategy to stall the project.

<sup>128</sup> I am led to assume it was a deliberate move on his part.

boss, bringing the project to almost a complete halt. At one point, Muna stated that she was fearful that the Ministry of Education (MOE) would demand to know the source of both her funding and material donated. Given that Lexicon was linked with Free Masons, and the free masons are rumoured to be linked with Zionists, she would be considered to be an Israeli agent who was plotting to hurt the school children. At the time, the public sentiment in Jordan<sup>129</sup> was against normalising relations with Israel, Muna found herself in a precarious position, since the MOH's approval was verbal. She knew she could not count on her boss for support, because he felt threatened by her zealousness and proactive professional behaviour. In his mind he felt that only Muna would get credit for her work on the project and not his department.<sup>130</sup> Muna said that her boss had strong connections with one of the prominent powerful tribes in Jordan. Since they "are influential" she said, "they could undermine any *wasta* I might have."<sup>131</sup> By choosing to place obstacles for Muna, her boss tried to portray her as incompetent. It is highly probable that he thought that if he succeeded in causing her to fail, he would appear successful, and would not need to exert any extra effort at his job. Her boss interpreted the professional challenge ahead of him as a personal challenge and was unable to separate the two issues, since Muna was a competent woman, a role he assumed to solely belong to males. The amount of time and energy he spent in pulling Muna back could have been applied to productive work.

Her boss's efforts to undermine her project did not end when she finally managed to get the project off the ground. On the days that she did not go out to the schools, he would drop by her office and say, "Be careful, don't ignore your clinic work." He repeated these so-called friendly warnings often. They were subtle threats, setting the stage for future action. By telling her to be

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<sup>129</sup> And continues to be

<sup>130</sup> My interpretation since he always referred to the project as Muna's project.

<sup>131</sup> Sakijha and Sa'eda (2000) argue that if she managed to find a more powerful *wasta*, then she would have a chance succeeding.

careful, he was letting her know that he was capable of having her transferred to a remote rural area, and his actions were justifiable because he had been cautioning her all along. Because the only formal grievance available to her is to go through her boss and then his boss, her chances of reversing such a decision would be impossible.

Whenever Muna hit a stumbling block in her project, she would seek the help of a colleague at the MOH headquarters, who listened and tried to help her out indirectly. Her boss understood the indirect messages and would get angry with her. To ease the tension, she would engage in a communication of care-taking “I didn’t contact you because I didn’t want to trouble you. I was only trying to spare you the headache.” She went on to say, “If I listen to my boss, nothing will happen. He believes that the children don’t deserve preventative treatments.”

One day her colleague from MOH and his boss, Ahmad, dropped by her office. When her boss found out about the surprise visit, he was furious because he was unprepared and was not at the scene to greet the dignitaries when they arrived, a role he is expected to assume. He barged into her office and said to Muna in the presence of the MOH officials:

Did you know ... that everything you are doing is wrong. You don’t give a shit about anybody [she apologized for using the term shit – but she said this is what he said] – you don’t care about anybody – as if there is no director for this centre. If you have a problem you should come to me – I should not have to find out that somebody from the ministry has come by. [Muna went on to say] “I was so shocked I just opened my mouth.” Then Ahmed said, “You know he is right.” I was shocked [even] more – this is the guy who told me four days ago that I should have come to him first, when I had the problems. It is very confusing to get different [contradictory] advice.

Her boss, by barging into her office and by the manner in which he spoke to her, sent a clear message to Muna that (a) she was a trouble-maker, (b) she had overstepped her boundaries and

was disrespectful of official protocol, and (c) he thought of her as a child and not a professional woman. It is obvious that he regarded her enthusiasm for her the project as a personal challenge. She was extremely distressed at the games her bosses were playing. What troubled her the most was her boss's attempt to portray her as a trouble-maker to the MOH officials. They knew what was really going on, yet, decided to stand by her boss because of the bond of fraternal patriarchy.<sup>132</sup> By losing the support of her colleague at the MOH headquarters, she lost a source of power, the power that comes from building alliances (Lips 1991). In addition, she was receiving conflicting messages regarding when and to whom she was supposed to refer to in times of crises. She also complained that her boss deliberately was trying to tarnish her honourable status by giving others the impression that they were having an affair.

On the school front, Muna continued to experience resistance from the school principal after all the stumbling blocks were cleared. She said:

At school when I'm trying to do the project – and I am stressing the need for punctuality with the school director, [the latter would] say, “Oh- Muna – you are behaving in the western way. We are here in Jordan.”

The principal was trying to shame Muna because Muna was trying to utilise her time efficiently. The principal resorted to an underhanded strategy of accusing Muna of abandoning her cultural practices and was acting like a westerner in the Arab world. Perhaps the principal felt her authority was being diminished since someone else was changing the pace of work at the school, and feared being undermined.

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<sup>132</sup> Pateman (1988, 3 emphasis in the original) argues “women are subordinated to men as *men*, or to men as fraternity”, with the latter being the modern fraternal patriarchy. What she means is that the rule of the father is replaced by the rule that all men are brothers, and as brothers they create the new modern form of fraternal patriarchy, which is commonly known as the old boys network.

To add another twist to Muna's story,

Once I had an Egyptian client who came to my clinic at the district. He had [an infection] ... so I couldn't do anything [until I treated it]. When I told him that – the guy accompanying him took off his shoe and tried to hit me with it. I wrote a complaint to the district. They called me to the office and instead of looking into the matter they said, "Why is it that you are the only one who has complaints? Why are you the only one who has experiences like this? Nobody else seems to have problems." This was their response. [Since they did not support her, her other legal recourse was to raise the issue to the mayor]. Then they asked me – "Are you sure you want to raise this case to the mayor?" I said, "Yes." They tried to change my mind, but I refused. I went with him [Tarik, the personnel officer who was handling the case] to the mayor. [Tarik] told me to sit down on the bench and he went and met with the mayor. Nothing happened. In fact, after that the 18-year-old boy who tried to hit me in my office would every day – circle around the building with his brother in their car – as a means of threat[ening me]. They kept doing this until I filed a complaint with the police. The reason I went to the police was when these guys started circling the building I went to the mayor's office to find out what was going on with my case. I was told "nothing." When I asked why – they said unless I followed up on the case – nothing will happen. Then I asked, "What do I need to do?" they answered, "Go to the police station and complain", which I did. My boss and his boss refused to go with me because they said 'I could manage on my own'. At the police station – I was told that a policeman would accompany me to the house of the accused. When the police entered their house they started apologizing. I was advised by my boss to solve this issue in a tribal manner. After all that I went through I thought that maybe it would be my best option. So, I made this guy's family resolve this dispute tribally. Their family elders came to my house to apologize (Muna).

In the eyes of the men she was interacting with, she was not supposed to exercise her agency in the public sphere. She was seen as an intruder into the male professional domain, therefore, if she ran into difficulties it was her problem, it was because she wasn't supposed to be there in the first place. Muna experienced a situation where she occupied a *position of status incongruity*, "the high achieved status of her role conflicts with the lowest ascribed status of her sex" (Lips



1991, 20). Besides, her presence as a professional woman subverted the image of men as rational, strong and powerful and women as weak, passive and dependent. These gender images, as Lips (1991) and Connell (1987) argue are etched into the psyche of individuals and are difficult to dislodge. Thus, Muna was perceived as un-womanly, unfeminine, and a trouble-maker. A woman is expected to go with her guardian when she goes to the police station. Her bosses' decision not to accompany her to the police station was their way of informing her that she transgressed her feminine boundaries and did not deserve their protection.<sup>133</sup> This incident also highlights the bureaucratic maze individuals have to go through in Jordan. Rai (1995) describes a similar situation for women in India, and considers this to be part of the problems women face in neo-colonial states.

To summarise, Muna challenged her boss' levels of power: the personal (as a male), collective (men's network) and institutional (in his capacity as her boss), which are interlinked within the prevailing GPD. Changes in one sets off changes in the others (Lips 1991, 14). Several issues are involved in GPD between Muna, her bosses and other male colleagues. Firstly, her boss as a man is having difficulty with a female entering the public sphere, implying that he is having difficulty with changes in traditional gender roles and subsequently GPD. Secondly, as a civil servant, who has been in the system for years, her boss is accustomed to a comfortable routine, and did not want the disruptions that Muna was causing through her project. Thirdly, Muna's professional attitude and her need to accomplish her project threatened his authority, since he is used to being the sole decision maker.

Muna became aware of her boss's games of trying to stop her from implementing her project. So she acted proactively by having a back-up plan for every step, to ensure that her project would

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<sup>133</sup> Hijab (1988) notes it is shameful for women to go to court or to the police station.



be completed on time. Her boss was happy when she encountered delays and would make sarcastic remarks. He also sought to compromise her honourable status by (a) deliberately talking to her in an informal manner, a mode of communication reserved to close intimate relationships and (b) by not accompanying her to the police station.

Several factors affected Muna's agentic action and ability to exercise her power. Aside from the gender issue and gender relations, the other major factors were: socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes towards women's entry into the public arena, *wasta* and customary law, bureaucratic red tape and hierarchical system within the governmental institutions, lack of a grievance system, reliance on oral explanations without confirmation by written memos leading to miscommunications, and the interconnection of the government's poor economic situation with the political situation.

All three cases stress the interconnectedness of the private sphere with the public sphere, the nature of familial, social, and state politics and the notion of men and women's honour. The cases also point out to the difficulty men are having in accepting women's entry into the public domain. The examples are illustrative of some of the challenges women face once they step into the work place.

## CONCLUSION

Both accepting notions of honourable femininity and resisting it involve risky strategies for single women. The former implies women's collusion with familial and societal values and ceding their agency. The latter places a strain on their familial bonds. Women must tread carefully when defining their notions of honour. They need the protection and support of their family for their social, and in rare situations, physical survival. A woman's full independence

from her family risks placing a question mark on her and her family's honour and reputation. In addition, she places a question mark on her father and/or brother's ability to control her, implying that her male kin are unable to and/or unwilling to protect her, which has a direct bearing on their masculinity.

For women to be considered part of the extended family and to have their support and protection means giving up some of their personal power (Sa'ar 2001). This is what women mean by not trespassing the red line. Women cannot afford to damage their bond of connectivity with their family (Joseph 1994, 1999), since their social survival hinges on maintaining strong family ties. Scheff (1988) refers to this emotional connection as a deference-emotion system,<sup>134</sup> where women's fear of severing their bond with their family pushes them to please their family.<sup>135</sup> Connell (1987) refers to the power of the emotional bonds in maintaining the gender order as cathexis. Women not only attempt to please their parents, but their brothers and/or husbands.<sup>136</sup> Antoun (1968) makes it clear that a Jordanian woman's natal family is her protective armour in cases of disputes with members of society<sup>137</sup> or if her honourability is questioned. Women need their family's approval to strengthen the existing connectivity with their family and to ensure their existence as individuals within their family relationship. However, when women please their parents it is often on their own terms, and not simply on those of their parents'. The pleasing process is a series of negotiations in which the boundaries of a woman's honourability are being stretched or contracted. The complexity of this process does not deter women from trying to push their boundaries. I also have attempted to show the various ways women define

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<sup>134</sup> In a follow-up article he refers to this system as an "emotional-relational structure" (Scheff 2000).

<sup>135</sup> Scheff does not focus only on women, he is talking of individuals in general.

<sup>136</sup> As I will show in the following chapter.

<sup>137</sup> Or her husband if she is married.

honourable womanhood, their strategies of resistance to conventional femininity and their need to educate and include their parents in their journey.

With regard to family life, single women resent the loss of agency when their parents impose or attempt to impose a curfew on social outings. They feel obliged to steer a prudent course with their parents due to normative cultural values. The majority of single women live with their parents who provide for them in various degrees. This places these women in a double bind. The single women resent feeling trapped and know that they have little prospect for change in their life, and, at the same time, they feel indebted to their families because of the bonds of connectivity and the sacrifices their parents made.

With regard to their education and professional careers, single women have stated that neither has provided them with the autonomy they desire. They often lead conflictual lives full of struggle and frustration. As Maher (1978, 122) argues, single women are role models for younger women who identify with them. "Their choices are watched critically and tentatively by women who hope to make their own, even if such hopes are objectively unrealistic." These women have transgressed the male-model of honourable behaviour/womanhood in which traditional women are accomplices. The single women I have interviewed seek to create their own definition of honour and are aware of their vulnerability if their fathers are traditional and/or dominant. Obviously the line transgressing the code of modesty is ambiguous and depends on the definitions of the parties concerned, rendering the matter contestational.

It is evident from the exemplars in this chapter that women's outer appearance belies their attitude. Their contradiction is symptomatic of their struggle between the codes of honourable femininity that they have internalised and their desire for their independence and autonomy. I

will discuss this further in the last chapter. Many single women contemplated marriage to get them out of the trap, but they realize there are no guarantees that their future husband will not turn out to be a carbon copy of their parent(s). Their reasoning is based on the cultural premise whereby a woman gains respect, freedom, independence and individuality through marriage. The next chapter examines the experiences of married professional women.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MARRIED WOMEN: CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT OR AN ERA OF FRUSTRATION?

Jordanian women consider motherhood their crowning achievement, automatically elevating them to honourable women.<sup>138</sup> According to Delaney (1987, 42) marriage is the only means whereby a woman from the Mediterranean area achieves “something like a social identity”, whereas Rosander (1997) notes that a woman’s main goal and her success in life is motherhood. Not surprisingly, the majority of participants in my fieldwork constantly reminded me of two of the Prophet’s sayings: first, “heaven lay under the feet of mothers.”<sup>139</sup> Second, the story of a man who asked the Prophet “who is the most deserving of my devotion?” three times in a row, and the Prophet consecutively thrice replied, “your mother.” Finally, when the man asked the Prophet for the fourth time, “then who?” The Prophet replied “Your father.”<sup>140</sup> The Prophet’s intention was to stress the importance and honourable position of motherhood. To married professional Jordanian women motherhood is both honoured and sanctified (Stowasser 1987a). The notion of professional career mother/wife is a new phenomenon (Davis 1993; Early 1993; Tubbeh 1994). An honourable wife stays at home and does not work among strangers (El Guindi

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<sup>138</sup> Based on my interviews with PEJW as well as public figures in society. Similar views were expressed by Afshar (1999); Fa’uri (1999); Mohsen (1985); Stowasser (1987b).

<sup>139</sup> See also Afshar (1999, 151) who notes a similar response.

<sup>140</sup> See also Awde (2000, 88); al-Shati’ (1999, 198).

1999; White 1994). Given that women's employment confounds the cultural ideal of an honourable woman and challenges the complementary model of male breadwinners and female homemakers (Watson 1994), how does having a career affect their status? Are they perceived as evading their duties as mothers and wives? Or are they able to honour their social responsibilities towards their immediate as well as extended family?

This chapter aims to explore how women maintain their honourable status when they pursue a professional career. Some participants were career women before they got married, others, pursued their professional career after marriage. The three main themes I will explore are: (1) how do professional married women manage a balance between their home and work responsibilities? (2) what effect does it have on their marital relationship and home life? (3) how are they perceived as professional women in their work? The layout of the chapter is as follows: I start by examining how women negotiate the division of labour with their husbands and manage their household chores. Based on the conjugal bargain women strike with their husband, three main marital relationships emerge: first, the egalitarian relationship, second, the traditional with its three subtypes, and third, the controlling/undermining relationship. The third is more of a transitional state, reflecting how some egalitarian or traditional marriages, during crisis temporarily turn into a controlling/undermining relationship.<sup>141</sup> I highlight their commonalities, and proceed to examine the micro dynamics of these relationships, including women's relationships with their spouse, daughter and son. I note two marital arrangements, love and rational marriages<sup>142</sup>, comment on the cultural attitude regarding casual female-male

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<sup>141</sup> Half of the marriages turned out egalitarian, and the other half was traditional. Some of each experienced transitional phases at times.

<sup>142</sup> Rational marriages simply are marriages where a woman feels that it is time for her to marry, mostly because of family and social pressure, and the characteristics of the potential partner are considered acceptable. This can be considered as a modern version of an arranged marriage. I will elaborate on this in this chapter.

relationships, and study how women select their mate in rational marriages. I then move on to women's marriage contracts, the stipulations they include, and their sexual lives. In the final section of this chapter I provide examples of women's triple burden (paid work, household responsibilities and social obligations). I also consider socio-cultural practices affecting women in their professional life, mainly the challenges faced by veiled women, women in non-traditional jobs, locally educated, and women with Ph.D.s.

## HONOURABLE VS. UNFIT MOTHER

The majority of professional married women I interviewed expressed their fear of being labelled negligent, self-indulgent, and unfit mothers because they chose to keep their professional career after marriage and having children. The difference between being labelled honourable vs. self-indulgent mother/wife is that negative labels keep married professional women feeling insecure and doubtful of their efforts. This discourse allows the manipulation of a woman's labour. Because a married career woman fears being labelled as self-indulgent or neglectful of her family obligations, she works twice as hard in both her home and profession. This means that professional married women experience marriage differently from men with respect to the division of labour. Like their western counterpart, the MPEJW I interviewed learn that marriage saddles them with household responsibilities considered to belong solely to them. Bernard (1982) captured this reality stating that there are two marriages in every marriage: "hers" and "his", with "his" being better than "hers." Bernard attributes the differences to the structural strains that marriage imposes on wives<sup>143</sup> (Steil 1997). Leonard (2001) argues that because husbands remain unwilling to assume their fair share of household work, they continue to be the

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<sup>143</sup> Refer to Rich (1976) who distinguished between motherhood as an institution (what culture constitutes as motherhood: its rules, demands, expectations, methods of enforcement and control), and the actual experience of women being mothers.

beneficiaries of the sexual division of labour. Even when men help out their wife at home, the men's share is about 30% (Bittman, Pixley et al. 1997). Hochschild (1989) estimates that women work an extra 15 hours per week more than their husband, and have less leisure time and social activity than men (Kabeer 1998, 97). Men's unpaid work is considered to be outdoor tasks such as home and car maintenance (weekly or monthly chores), while women's unpaid work is considered to be laundry, cooking and child care (daily activities, which are intensive and repetitive). Shopping and gardening are considered to be gender neutral, since both engage in them (Bittman, Pixley et al. 1997; Steil 1997).

Oakley (1974) raised the question of women's housework. She contended that it was not an extension of women's natural work. Rather, it was a job women engaged in, yet it lacked recognition, was considered non-work, associated with low rewards and performed in isolation. Thus, when married professional women enter the labour market, they do so under conditions less favourable than men (Leonard 2001). To ease their burden, many MPEJW rely on domestic help (Sabbagh 1997). However, for several reasons women who chose to have domestic help had ambivalent feelings about a live-in helper.<sup>144</sup> First, they needed to spend significant time training them, if they were from Sri Lanka, because the helpers did not know how to use the modern conveniences such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners. Second, both the professional married Jordanian women and their helpers struggled with the language barrier. They communicated using sign language and MPEJW would demonstrate to the helpers how to

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<sup>144</sup> A third of the women interviewed had no helpers, and most of the women were unsatisfied with the helpers they currently had. Only three were happy with their domestic helpers. One major difficulty for both parties is the fact that by law a helper stays two years in her current service. It is culturally unacceptable for a Jordanian woman to work as a domestic helper; it is considered a dishonourable job. During the 70s it was common to see young teenage girls from the urban poor who worked as domestic helpers. This practice diminished as officials started enforcing mandatory schooling for these teenage girls. Shami and Taminian (1990) note that refugee women (displaced after 1948 or 1976 war) worked as domestic helpers for a short period of time, however, once their male kin found work, they quit. Flynn and Oldham (1999) note that Jordanian women who work as domestic helpers quit once their male kin find work. Generally, the domestic helpers are women from the Philippines or Sri Lanka.



complete their tasks. Third, most of the helpers arrived suffering from medical problems such as being anaemic, diabetic or with lice. The MPEJW had to tend to the domestic helper's health needs, which was both time consuming and costly. Many would have three to five helpers in one year before they could find one that met their needs. The domestic helpers were responsible for house cleaning, washing fruits and vegetables and minding the children. The professional women cooked the family meal the night before or early in the morning before the family woke up, and the helpers would heat the meal before everyone arrived home in the afternoon. A major drawback for the Jordanian professional women is that, by hiring a female domestic helper, they reproduce traditional division of labour (Leonard 2001).

An example of women's extended domestic responsibilities is the ordeal of obtaining permission to hire a foreign domestic helper. Yara describes the time she wasted completing the legal paper work required to hire a domestic helper from Sri Lanka.

When I went to do my paper work for the maid, the clerk [at the government office] told me after waiting for half an hour in line that he needed in addition a photocopy of the document. So I did – when I returned back to him – he told me, I needed pictures [I assume of the domestic helper to process the application] – so when I returned he said I needed to put stamps on the paper (a form of taxation). I lost my cool and asked him whether he had nothing else to do other than ordering people around (Yara).

Yara is a director of a large organization and had to take time off work to do this, since her husband was out of the country on business. She had urgent matters at work and was eager to complete the paper quickly. To her dismay, the process turned out to be time consuming. Her experience is an example typical for individuals who have to complete paper work at most government agencies, known to be inefficient because of overstaffing. There are no instructions informing the citizen of the requirements needed to fulfil and expedite their application process.

For this reason, many companies, businesses and upper class families resort to *wasta* (Kilani and Sakijha 2002) or hire a person to run around the various government agencies to follow up on these types of procedures, since they are so time consuming. Moreover, usually it is the men who follow through on these matters. Women tend to rely on their male kin to complete most official forms, because some of the government clerks are not used to dealing with female clients. Consequently, women may either be served promptly, if the clerk treats them honourably, as a sister, or may experience discomfort because some clerks deliberately protract the process, because they want to get another look at them.

MPEJW are involved in their paid work, household, and social responsibilities including maintaining strong bonds with their natal and conjugal extended families. With the exception of paid work, the rest of women's work is considered as non-work, rendering it invisible. I refer to three jobs women engage in as the triple burden. Hartman (1987) stresses the need to examine the nature of work within the family, and the extent of control each individual has over the products of their labour. This entails examining the division of labour, how decisions are reached, and patterns of co-operation within the home (Finch and Mason 1993; Hochschild 1997; Morgan 1996). Sen (1990) advocates the notion of "cooperative conflict". He refers to the social arrangements of "who does what", "who gets to consume what" and "who takes what decision" as responses involving both cooperation and conflict. When a couple fail to cooperate, they reach a "breakdown position", which effects the bargaining position of both actors.

The strength of MPEJW's power is related to their connectivity with their children, especially their sons. Children are raised with the image of their mother as giving and self-sacrificing. This creates a sense of indebtedness, duty and obligation on the part of their offspring to protect their mothers. Thus mothers wield tremendous informal power based on family bonds (Altorki 1986,

1977; Joseph 1994b, 1999c; Rosander 1997) and their constant display of giving and self-sacrifice what Lips (1991, 53) refers to as a woman's "superior moral merit."

How do Jordanian professional women describe their marital relationship and what is their perception of gender relations? I will give several examples from my research.

Your husband's support is important for a woman to pursue her professional career ... The other important factor is the husband's acceptance of the changes that are evolving within the home, e.g. his wife moves from being a teacher with limited responsibilities to a judge who is a public figure. By the way, the minute I enter my home, I forget I'm a judge and perceive myself as a regular woman, a mother who gets orders and forgets she is a judge. She feeds her kids and cares for her family, takes on the role of a wife/mother. My role as a mother is important to me and it is a beautiful role. And the role of motherhood ... at times is instrumental in enhancing a woman's professional performances, allowing her to excel. It is important to me to have my husband's full support and his acceptance of the changes in my role. It is important for me to emphasize that given my professional advancement I have maintained my husband's status as the head of the household. I won't change our roles (Judge Taghrid Hikmat).

He's [my husband] very supportive and he's not – demanding nor -- *ya 'ni* we're equal, *ya 'ni* I feel we're equal. And it's very healthy – relationship - I think (Maya).

I also wish that he [my husband] would handle more responsibilities, to ease my burden. He relies very much on me with regards to household matters/private matters. I mean his responsibilities as a parent; he needs to be more involved ... [As for my professional career] I don't dare complain about work, because no one is forcing me to work. If I complain, he'll tell me to stay home, so I don't say a word (Widad).

I don't know it's crazy. Sometimes I feel like everything is okay, everything's under control at the office and then the next day ... I feel like I'm so much behind in office work or my goodness am I neglecting my kids or not doing something with them or you know. So – it's hard to really have this good balance you know. Especially when they are kids. You plan on something, the next day they are sick. ... But I can't do it alone,

*ya'ni* if it wasn't for my husband's support – and - and understanding I couldn't have done it by myself it's hard (Fida).

Let me talk about the home environment. No matter what, the man here, his thinking will always be *sharqi*. For example, my husband studied in America and he lived there for a number of years, to this day, he feels he should be the ultimate decision maker. I have to convince him. I will not try to deceive him, or play games with him. No way, I must convince him. Therefore, I must be very smart and hold onto my rights if I am going to improve my situation. Also, he [my husband] is not my enemy ... A very simple example, when we first got married I couldn't keep up between the demands of my work [profession] and visitors [people coming over to congratulate them]. He said, "OK, I'll bring someone to help you." So my husband said "OK, work till 2 pm, finish your main work" [she works with him in the family business] and he hired people to finish my [professional] work. Perhaps I'm lucky because I work with my husband. Maybe if I worked elsewhere I wouldn't be so lucky. So the man is not my enemy, he is the one who lifts the burden off of me, eases my difficulties; there is room for us [women] to assert our power and room for them [men] to assert theirs! It is therefore important to understand what is going on ... Things may not change during my generation but in the coming future generations. Change takes time. So I may make 40% of the decisions but in the end the decision is HIS (Samar).

These examples show variations in the relationships between husbands and wives. I have discerned two broad types, including a transitional one, of relationships between husband and wives. The distinction hinges on the husband's involvement with his wife.

## WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR SPOUSE

The relationships between married professional Jordanian women and their spouses range from an egalitarian caring one, to one where the power plays are hurtful and damaging. In general the husbands were raised in traditional homes, where their mothers were homemakers. Although MPEJW said that their husbands did not mind them having a career, the women felt that their husbands had not processed what that meant. The dual-career family is new to both husband and

wife. The change in their nascent roles has created marital tension with regards to family responsibilities and division of labour (Finch and Mason 1993; Imamoglu 2000; Sherif 1999). The men are products of their patriarchal culture. It can be inferred from the data that the majority of the husbands are confused with regards to their wives' having careers. Some who lived outside of Jordan said it was a positive experience because it forced them to rely on one another rather on their families. Similar to the findings of Jamieson (1999) and Steil (1997), the majority of the interviewed married women are disappointed because they want an understanding and interactive husband. Those who married western educated men expected a more open-minded and less traditional husband. In accordance with the findings of UNICEF (1997) and Watson (1994) some husbands perceived their wife's professional career as a threat. Because their wife earned an income they feared she would no longer be dependent on him, robbing him of his masculine role. Papanek (1990) reminds us that the relations between males and females are full of ambivalences and contradictions making change difficult. I will briefly comment on the relationships I ascertained.

1. Traditional marital relationship – both husband and wife tend to be conservative in their thinking. Division of labour is based on the notion of complementarity espoused in Islam where each partner has certain rights and responsibilities towards the other and the family. The husband is the breadwinner and the wife is the homemaker, even though she has a career. Although her husband acknowledges her professional status, he does not consider her a co-provider. The couple believe in the notion of peaceful co-existence where each partner is expected to sacrifice for the well-being and stability of the family. Both believe that when the woman takes up work, it is not supposed to infringe on her primary domestic responsibilities. Although the wife is solely in charge of the household responsibilities and makes some decisions, it is the husband who is the ultimate

decision-maker. Women choose to follow their husband's decision,<sup>145</sup> and their choice is influenced by religious and cultural beliefs, specifically the notion of *ta'a* and *nushuz*. Women believe that obedience is a prerequisite for the stability of marriage. As one stated, "In the end, somebody has to have the upper hand – somebody has to run the show", otherwise chaos will ensue and the family will break down. Conservative women and veiled women hold these views.<sup>146</sup> There are three subgroups in this category that I will explain at length within this chapter.

2. Egalitarian and thoughtful relationship – husband and wife tend to be more liberal regarding gender relations. In this relationship husbands attempt to be supportive of their wives and their careers, and are involved to varying degrees in helping out with household chores and childcare. The couple engage in interdependent decision-making, where both husband and wife debate the issues and arrive at a decision.

MPEJW push the boundaries of the relationship when they pursue their education or if they are very successful in their career. If their husband's sense of masculinity is threatened some marital relationships temporarily shift from a traditional or egalitarian one to one that is controlling or undermining. However, the relationship does not remain fixed as controlling or undermining. It

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<sup>145</sup> Their choice to comply may not be out of personal conviction; rather they are acquiescing because the alternative may mean marital discord or divorce.

<sup>146</sup> I have discerned two sub-groups among the veiled women in Jordan similar to the findings of (Afshar 1999) and (Gole 1996), see chapter five. The conservative Islamists in Jordan (hawks) believe that women's enumerated work is harmful to family life and undermines the divine GPD (Freij and Sawalha 2001; Stowasser 1987a), whereas the liberal Islamist (doves) perceive Islam as a dynamic and flexible religion, one that is able to adapt to the changing social needs of the times. Liberal Islamists distinguish between pure Islam (at its inception), characterized by its openness and tolerance from its later manifestation (Afshar 1999; Fa'uri 1999; Gole 1996; Stowasser 1987a; Wadud 1999).

shifts back to being egalitarian or traditional once peaceful coexistence ensued. The shift, therefore, is iterative.<sup>147</sup>

3. Undermining and controlling relationship – when a marital relationship shifts into this mode, it usually is related to a contested matter. The husband tends to be very traditional while the wife tends to be more liberal. There is a power struggle in the relationship at this juncture. The women were frequently stressed out and unhappy, though they did try to conceal it. When they did express their unhappiness they quickly followed their statement by “well, this is my nasib”. Some contemplated divorce, though they did not act on it. Women engaged in “pseudomutuality” a technique to deny the existence of gendered power struggle (Bittman, Pixley et al. 1997, 168). Bittman and Pixley define it as a “faked or a false complementarity, where the actor may deny or conceal evidence of non-mutuality in order to maintain a sense of reciprocal fulfilment” (p. 146). Pseudomutuality is women’s way to ease marital tension and their complicity in their own inequality.

The three types of marital relationships are not mutually exclusive. Their boundaries are permeable and in some instances they overlap. The purpose of the typologies is to show that there are variations in marital relationships and degrees of marital support. These types apply to women with love or rational marriages.<sup>148</sup> Neither the husband’s education (West or non-West) nor his level of education was significant. The ages of MPEJW ranged from their late 20s to late 50s. Some of the women chose to delay having children, others had young children, while there

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<sup>147</sup> It is beyond the scope of this research to determine the predisposing factors that cause the reiterative shift.

<sup>148</sup> The typologies applied to both western educated and non-western educated professional women, irrespective of their religious belief (Christians or Muslims) or if the women are veiled or non-veiled.



were those with adolescent offspring or married offspring. One woman stated that she and her husband could not have children. The older professional women tended to be women who chose to pursue their education and professional career after rearing their children. What these couples shared in common will be now delineated.

## COMMONALITIES BETWEEN EGALITARIAN, TRADITIONAL AND CONTROLLING MARRIAGES

Dual-career families, are a recent phenomenon in Jordan. Most of these couples are pioneers in the sense that they are “creative variants” breaking away from the traditional pattern (Rapoport and Rapoport 1976, 23). The professional married women I interviewed are pioneers since they have no role models to emulate or to learn from, and so are their husbands, if the marriage was of the egalitarian type.

All the couples believe in the notion of complementarity. However, the degree to which each type adhered to this notion differed, with egalitarians having a more flexible definition. Not surprisingly, the majority of women did not discuss with their husband the division of labour in the home either prior to or after the marriage. They operated on a hidden conjugal bargain, based on the notion of complementarity. Among the egalitarian couples, when I pressed women for the reason they did most of the so-called female chores, most would say, “the division of labour just happened”; or “the one most suited for the job does it.” Women were complicit in reproducing the gendered division of labour.



Married women were not keen in achieving a “pure relationship”<sup>149</sup> (Giddens 1992). Rather, they talked about the need to give and take in their marital relationship, an inherent principle within the notion of complementarity. Similar to the studies of Imamoglu (2000) and Jamieson (1999) MPEJW want support, empathy and understanding from their husband and equitable means of dividing the burden of childcare and household responsibilities. Since they accept the notion of men and women’s complementary roles and are now professional career women, they expect their husbands to become more involved in household matters. These women want recognition, acknowledgement of and assistance in their natural work. They want their husbands to recognize that effort and work goes into making a house a home. As Lama stated:

He is not the only one working and having a hard time. I too am working, and when I get home I have to clean and straighten the house and have the meal ready when he gets home.

Despite the lack of recognition for their efforts, all the women interviewed are proud of their traditional role as mothers. However, intermingled with their sense of pride is a fear of being perceived as negligent in their maternal or wifely duties and unfit mothers. Perhaps socio-religious notions of *ta’a* and *nushuz* caused some MPEJW to fear their husbands divorcing them or taking on a second wife, though none overtly expressed this fear. These socio-religious notions are powerful because they contain assumptions of how things ought to be and how they should work with regard to the social order and gender relations, consequently shaping women’s actions.

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<sup>149</sup> “A pure relationship has nothing to do with sexual purity, and is a limiting concept rather than only a descriptive one. It refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it” (Giddens 1992, 58).

MPEJW worried that their reputation as honourable wives/good mothers would be tarnished. As Finch and Mason (1993, 149) point out, there are three elements to one's reputation: "the shared image" of woman as mother/wife within her kin group and I would add community. Second, "this shared image is stable over time", and third that "the image does matter" since it affects how individuals behave towards each other. In addition, one's reputation impacts the social construction of their "moral" identity (p.154).

Because of their need to be perceived as honourable wives, most women were reluctant to confront their husbands. In general women tended to keep in mind the cost-benefit ratio and how it affects them in the long term (Korpi 1985; Scott 1985). Commenting on Johnson's work (1976), Lips (1991) notes that women's use of power tends to be more indirect, helpless, and personal because women have less control over their resources. They tend to "stick to the less aggressive forms of power and are considered out of line if they adopt direct, competent, concrete influence methods" (p. 66). However, as noted in chapter one, Jordanian women tend to be indirect because it is the expected and proper way honourable women behave. Women tend to rely on indirect strategies and methods of power since their power is not considered legitimate. All the noted factors are significant elements encouraging women to remain indirect in their approaches to their spouse.

Women's triple burden was a common feature among all the married professional women, i.e. they needed to balance between their immediate household duties, extended family and social obligations and demands of their professional career. Depending on their position within their life course (Doucet 1995) their juggling act was perceived as either demanding or taxing. Like their western counterpart, MPEJW wished their husbands would share in the emotional labour (Duncombe and Marsden 1995; Hochschild 1997; Hochschild and Machung 1989).

MPEJW stressed the importance of their children's education, and sent their children to private schools even if it was not within their budget. Given their concern about the uncertainty and instability in Jordan and the region (El Kharouf 2000; Joseph and Slyomovics 2001; UNDP 2002), the women and their husbands were willing to sacrifice in order to give their offspring the best education possible. All the women were concerned about their future and the future of their family. Many had already applied for citizenship in Northern America, Europe, Australia and/or New Zealand.

Like western women, MPEJW with young children, and those who chose to further their education while raising their children, suffered the most with relation to conflicting demands or "time-bind" (Hochschild 1997), and sleep deprivation. Every woman said it was difficult to balance between her home life and professional career.<sup>150</sup> They tended to shift their time between both domains to ensure that family life was sustained. They had contradictory feelings regarding the impact of their professional careers on their home life. They believed their jobs are good for their families, but they feel guilty about neglecting their home and children. All the women perceived their paid work to be a source for personal and professional fulfilment.<sup>151</sup> Professional Jordanian women see themselves as fighters because they struggle for their rights at work, as well as struggle to maintain their respect and dignity as professional married women. As Steil (1997, xvi) notes, women are the ones who tend to be the initiators and enforcers of change. However, for change to take place, men must become involved.<sup>152</sup> All the women agreed that their ability to pursue their professional career after marriage was directly linked to their husband and family's support. Like single women, married women talked about being careful

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<sup>150</sup> They were unable to separate their professional lives from their personal lives, which contradicts Gordon's (1994) findings.

<sup>151</sup> My results corroborate the work by El Kharouf (2000), Flynn and Oldham (1999) and Sabbagh (1997).

<sup>152</sup> This point was made very clear to me when I was examining the types of existing feminisms in Jordan. See next chapter.

not to exceed the imaginary red line because they worried about gossip. Older women were less concerned, than the younger women.

#### EGALITARIAN AND THOUGHTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

These are relationships where the women are able to develop their independent professional careers based on their levels of education and personal initiative; the husband's job did not stop the woman from pursuing a career. The couple share financial responsibilities, and pool their resources, similar to arrangements reported by Mohsen (1985) and Pahl (1983, 1989). The husbands recognise and acknowledge their wife's financial contribution, and rely on the dual income to make ends meet. Although the husbands do help with childcare and some of the household responsibilities, women still bear the brunt of the household responsibilities,<sup>153</sup> and emotional labour, which infringes on their leisure time and professional careers. Husbands were aware of their wife's decreased leisure time and consciously made the effort to give their wife time to themselves, by either taking the children out of the house for a couple of hours, telling their wife to go out shopping, or to spend time with her friends while the husband babysat.

The majority of women married their husbands for love; however, there are those who chose their husbands for pragmatic-rational reasons (rational marriages). Couples had similar levels of education and were in their early 30s to late 40s. There were couples where the wife was older than the husband, and a couple with an interfaith marriage.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> In a sense this marital arrangement can be considered a combination of what Steil (1997, 44) alludes to as participant marriage (both work, both share parenting responsibilities, but household duties are strictly hers), and role-sharing where both share in all the responsibilities.

<sup>154</sup> The wife is Christian and the husband is Muslim. This still is uncommon and culturally frowned upon.

One woman recounted how her husband, Musa, would help with hanging the children's cloth diapers on the roof of their house, in the early to mid 70s. They never thought much about Musa's role in assisting her, but the neighbours did. The men in the neighbourhood came over and informed the couple that Musa was creating a problem for them because their wives would soon start demanding the same from them. These men were threatened by the changes in gender roles and did not want to lose their privileges. The neighbourhood women were also indoctrinated to believe in the strict traditional gender roles and were complicit partners in perpetuating the gendered nature of work

Yes. All the women of [the neighbourhood] came and told me off. That how come you let your husband, [with a respectable job], go out and hang nappies? (Mayyada)

When the moral framework of honourable wife is reinforced by people it serves to restrict women to correct domains of action, and contributes to a painful slowness in change (McCallum 1999).

Fida said that on two occasions when she had to travel abroad for business her husband chose to care for the children ages three and six, rather than asking his mother or mother-in-law to care for the children

The eldest was sick with fever and had an ear infection. He insisted on me going. He managed their care. He didn't have my mother or mother-in-law come over and take care of them (Fida).

Fida's husband, Munir, is an involved father and takes pride in his wife's professional career and has a close relationship with his sons. Fida commented on how lucky she is to have an involved husband who is willing to share in parenting. Although they are a young couple in their mid 30s,

and her husband is very caring, Fida complained that Munir refused to hug her in the airport after he was gone on a long trip

I go to pick him up from the airport - he hugged the kids so warmly you know ... okay I come all the way for this reception what is this? So we come home "Come here I miss you - let me hug you." [He said] "No, don't touch me." ... I felt really disappointed ... Because I go so excited and full of - love and affection and you feel rejected you know, you feel HURT ... I'm your wife for Christ's sake! Who cares about [what] those people [in the airport think of us?] *ya 'ni* we are strangers in the airport - even the *muhajjabat* (veiled women) they hug and they kiss" *ya 'ni*, you know. ... I'm not asking [him] to kiss me ... I just want a welcome back [hug] (Fida).

Fida was upset and could not understand why her husband was reluctant to hug her. She is angry since they consider themselves to be a modern couple. Yet, because her husband is shy and thinks it is '*aib*'<sup>155</sup> to hug his wife in public, he refused to hug her<sup>156</sup> and when she tried he said, "don't touch me." She was hurt because she wanted him to show her affection and his intimacy through a hug. Her struggle with her husband's seemingly lack of emotion in public is similar to most of the young married women's accounts, who have also complained that they can't walk down the street holding their husband's hand because people would mistake them for lovers and start making offensive remarks. These examples as well as the next are indicative of society's resistance to visible changes in gender relations. As Connell (1987) reminds us gender relations in society at large may not reflect what is happening on the micro-level. MPEJW are pushing for change in gender relations.

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<sup>155</sup> '*Aib* means shameful

<sup>156</sup> As Singerman (1995, 53) states it is important for both individuals and families that others respect them, and perhaps Munir feared that by expressing his affection to his wife in public, he would lose respect both as a family man and businessman. So by not hugging his wife he was unconsciously promoting and reproducing his positive reputation in the community.

Sahar describes people's unease when they realise that she is not conforming to the traditional role of an honourable wife: who pampers and waits on her husband and cooks him a hot meal every day. Although they know she is a professional working woman, they disregard this point, and expect her to fulfil her role according to cultural customs (Al-Khayyat 1990; Altorki 1986). Not only is she expected to cook elaborate meals for her husband, but also to entertain family by preparing lavish meals. Sahar and her husband have different ideas about the division of labour. Steil (1997) and Thompson and Walker (1989) note that a husband and wife's attitude towards the wife's paid work has important implications regarding the division of labour and the woman's well being. Sahar's husband enjoys cooking and does not expect his wife to cook. She has shocked people by admitting that she has decided to take advantage of her husband's hobby.

I was pressured to marry when I was a single woman. I was told I was working too much and couldn't find a man. And then after marriage, was under pressure not to work too much because I am a married woman. [Remembering an important detail she exclaimed] Ah! - [According to people I'm supposed] to cook. I said, I cook when I feel I can. My husband cooks too. I don't like to cook every day and I don't HAVE to cook every day. I get these surprised looks all the time. "Where do you eat? Where does your husband eat?" I say [casually] we either eat out or we eat at my father's house - or my sister's house or whoever will take us [laughing]. Or we go home and make a sandwich together. And that is a bit surprising - I am NOT spending time pampering my husband. But my husband doesn't want that. We are working together (Sahar).

When couples decide to carve out for themselves unconventional gender roles with respect to the division of labour, they face difficulties from outsiders and, at times, family. Even when couples try to exercise their agency as a family unit, they experience social pressures to conform to the status quo (Stowasser 1987a). Thus, single women are not the only ones who feel that people interfere in their lives, so do non-traditional married couples.



### *Interdependent Decision-Making*

To find out how couples made important decisions I asked them how they went about choosing a school for their child(ren).<sup>157</sup> In egalitarian couples, both the husband and wife actively searched for schools. They visited the schools and talked to the teachers and their friends before deciding. In this type of relationship there was no apparent dominant decision maker. Both husband and wife discussed their thoughts and feelings on the issue. The women were not reluctant to disagree or confront their spouse. Decision-making was a joint effort, what Imamoglu (2000, 106) terms “cooperative interdependence” rather than unilateral.

No leading pattern emerged in property ownership. In the case of the interfaith marriage, the husband registered the deed of the house in his wife’s name, and made her the beneficiary of his bank account, which he opened overseas, because, by law, a non-Muslim cannot inherit from a Muslim. This couple had a daughter, which automatically meant that a large percentage of the husband’s wealth would be distributed to his brother(s) and nephews, since a woman’s share of inheritance is smaller according to the *shari’a*.<sup>158</sup> The husband acted in the interest of his wife and daughter. With a Christian couple, where both the husband and wife set up and run the

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<sup>157</sup> I chose to focus on the school rather than money in case couples might find my question too intrusive. I did ask questions regarding the management and control of money as most researchers do (Pahl 1983, 1989; Safilios-Rothschild 1970). With regards to the management of money two main patterns emerged among all the participants regardless of the type of marriage they had, pooling their resources, or an allowance system. The pooling system was the most prevalent system, and women spend their income on the family. Only one woman who is an egalitarian marital relationship said that she did not discuss financial decisions with her husband “It was my husband’s decision. I don’t discuss these things with him. I don’t think it is right” (Noura). However, I noted in my second and third interview with her that she did discuss these matters, but left him to have the last word.

<sup>158</sup> For detailed information regarding this matter, see Awde (2000); Wadud (1999); Karam (1998); Wilcox (1998).



business, the house is in the husband's name. The wife seemed comfortable with this arrangement given that she has two sons, and is secure in her relationship with her husband.<sup>159</sup>

A Muslim couple had joint ownership in their home and business, a rarity. The reason they made this arrangement, she said, has to do with the fact that they have four daughters and no sons, and therefore both were looking out for their daughters' interest. With another Muslim couple, the husband decided to put the house in his wife's name. Her ownership of the house was related to her husband's generosity. She did not ask nor think to have the house in her name. One Muslim couple split their property; the husband put the house in his name, and the business, which his wife manages, in her name. The significance for women owning property is that it gives them financial security and leverage when bargaining (Agarwal 1997). Most MPEJW did not own property. When they did, it was because their father or husband had gifted it to them. They did not pursue it, implying that women are complicit in their own financial inequality.

Women talked about the emotional and psychological support they received from their husband. Both wife and husband shared their daily experiences with one another. One woman said that her husband took an active interest in her work because both studied and worked in the same field. Some wives said they were expected to listen to their husband's stories since their husbands considered their stories to be more important. One of the greatest challenges dual-career couples face is forging a modern marital relationship when both were brought up in traditional families.

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<sup>159</sup> Customarily, sons are expected to support their parents financially, especially when their parents are advanced in age (Joseph 1999; White 1994). Christian women seemed less anxious regarding in whose name the property is registered. Perhaps this is related to the fact that Christian women do not fear being arbitrarily divorced. When I asked Muslim women whether they had property in their name a few of the young women turned white. They realised that although they were financially contributing to the house payment, the property was not in their name. In the case of divorce or their husband's death they would be in a precarious situation, especially if they had no sons. At least now, since amendment to the Personal Status Law were submitted in 2001, and temporarily approved by the Senate on Dec. 13, 2001, a wife who is repudiated arbitrarily can request compensation.

These couples build their modern marriage “with one foot in the past, mimicking traditional marriages of their parents’ generation, and one foot in the feminist influenced present” (Silberstein 1992; quoted in Steil 1997, 53).

The wives in egalitarian marital relationships tended to have demanding jobs. Some were leading public figures, directors of NGOs or owners and managers of their private business. Two of the participants, with their husband’s full support, pursued their Masters degree at the University of Jordan, while working full time and having young children at home. When I asked Hiba how she approached her husband when she decided to go back to university and pursue her degree she said:

My husband was supportive. In the beginning, he was taking it like “OK, this is a part-time thing” and then he would say, “Well, you’re not going to take it too seriously are you?” Well, I said, “This is how I’m starting, but how it’s going to end, I don’t know.” ... Since day one he knows I’m a person who wants to educate myself and he is very proud of this and he has accepted this and thinks highly of this. He has a very progressive mind – and with his daughters he is like this. He has a daughter that has been studying in the U.S. for the past six years – and she has been there all alone. This is fine. My youngest is in Beirut in A.U.B. It is O.K. He doesn’t have these hang-ups where women have to stay at home. He has a very progressive mind when it comes to women, men and education. [He thinks that if] you have a good mind – you should use it – stand on your own feet – you should know things and carry on your life on your own. He is a person who doesn’t want me to be dependant on him – because – he thinks – he anticipates that – maybe one day I’ll need to live on my own and what would I do? I need to be on my own two feet and I need to have my own identity. We NEVER had an argument about you can do this and you can do that! Really, I don’t remember it at all. Whenever it came to education [his attitude is] – fine, O.K. – “if I can afford it – just go” (Hiba).

MPEJW in egalitarian marriages described their husband’s attitude towards their education as similar to Hiba’s story. Although the husbands tended to be easy-going and did not have

conventional views on gender roles, the burden of household responsibilities, including training the domestic helper and emotional labour, remained as the woman's prime responsibility (Leonard 2001; Hochschild and Machung 1989, Steil 1997).

In cases where both the husband and wife had pressing deadlines in their paid work, and one had to sacrifice their time to stay with the children, it was usually the women. Fida said that her husband's professional needs took precedence over hers in cases of conflict over time.<sup>160</sup> She said,

Where do I go with the kids? I'm the one who is expected to make my professional work fit into my family responsibilities. His commitments to work are more important than mine (Fida).

Although they have an egalitarian relationship, Fida considers that her husband still perceives himself as the head of the household, because he feels he is entitled to put his career needs above hers, i.e. her career is not considered as primary (Steil 1997). As Hochschild (1997) argues, a woman's concession is indicative that her primary role remains that of a mother and wife.

### *Relationship With Extended Family*

Yara talks about her dilemma because she and her husband have to be away for work. She has considered taking her three-year-old daughter along, but, since she is in a high profile job, she is not sure whether she can. She did ask her mother or mother-in-law to take care of her daughter. She doesn't feel comfortable imposing on them since both women are in their mid 70s. Her predicament sheds light on the changing nature of the extended family structure in Jordan.

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<sup>160</sup> In other words, although they have an egalitarian relationship her husband still perceives himself as the head of the household, because he feels he is entitled to put his career needs above his wife's, and her career was not considered as primary (Steil 1997, 49-50).

Women cannot always count on the support of their extended family, and the state has not filled this vacuum (Dahlerup 1994; Orloff 1993).

Manal works long hours, as a supervisor in middle management. She is lucky to live in a flat above her in-laws. She knows that if she is late coming home, her children are safe because her mother-in-law is there to oversee their needs. Her husband is supportive of her professional demands. However, her own mother tells her that she is being neglectful of her honourable responsibilities as mother/wife. Yara does not live close by her natal family or her in-laws, and her mother and mother-in-law are not young enough to enjoy running around after their grandchildren. So, for MPEJW, the proximity of their residence to their immediate natal family or in-laws plays a crucial role in helping them out (Hanssen-Bauer, Pederson et al. 1998), as well as the life cycle and age of all the respective family members (UNESCO/SID 1995).

Fida, the youngest daughter of ten children, finds herself having to divide her time between her conjugal family needs and her natal family needs since both her parents are in their early 90s and have serious illnesses which require them to be hospitalised frequently. Fida has chosen not have a domestic helper, so on days when her parents are ill, she has a long day, cooking one large meal for two families. She runs between her conjugal home, her work and natal home. She does not live near her parents, nor her work place, and spends a great deal of time coordinating her time between her three responsibilities.

### *Egalitarian Mothers And Their Daughters And Sons*

The professional married women in egalitarian relationships hoped that their daughters would have more freedom than they did when they were young. They tended to be more open with their

daughters, and eager to provide them with opportunities equal to their brothers'. Mayyada was distressed that her sons tried to control her daughter.

I want my daughter to experience freedom - I don't want her to be restricted to wearing and dressing conservatively - I get angry and have expressed my anger to my sons when they interfere and order my daughter to dress properly (Mayyada).

Her daughter was sitting next to her and mentioned "I feel frustrated because my father, who has the right to discipline me, doesn't even interfere in my style of dress."

Mayyada is baffled by her sons' attitude since she did not raise them to interfere in their sister's affairs, nor did she raise them to be conservative in their thinking towards women.

And it baffles me because I feel that ... the boys think [girls have] too much freedom ... The boys don't think about [marrying] the girls they're going out with - they think of [marrying] girls who they don't go out with ... The boy's mentality is very - I don't know if I can use the word conservative, they like to be conservative or that's how they think. And the girls, they think that on the contrary they should go out and meet people, [fall in] love and marry ... I see that there is a gap between the two [young men and women] (Mayyada).

Professional mothers are distressed by their son's/sons' attitude towards their sister(s). Their son(s) have strict notions of gender roles though they were not raised this way. Many perceive their sons to be less open minded than their husbands and fathers. This is difficult for them because they feel ineffective, as if they have failed to influence their son(s). Suzie's son is 14 months older than his sister and is always trying to control his sister and ordering her around. Suzie said, "We are always trying to stop him and telling her not to obey him."

Professional women are torn between wanting their daughters to have more freedom and the need to protect them. Liberal mothers are against raising their daughters in a very conservative manner where everything is considered *haram* (taboo) and *'aib*. They bemoan the fact that they were raised not knowing how to relate to men which handicapped them in their adult lives. These mothers are very critical of their over-protective upbringing. For example, Nadia said when she first met her husband "I was so afraid – so afraid – I saw him as cross-eyed." It is for this reason they spend time talking with their children and take an active interest in their daily lives. Suzie said when she was young she was always afraid of doing anything that might be considered wrong by others because she didn't want to harm her family's reputation. Consequently, she didn't know how to behave with boys, as she grew older. She did not know what her parameters were and what was considered right or wrong. What guided her behaviour was her fear of doing something wrong. These women did not want their daughters to go through this experience. They want their daughter(s) to experience more freedom, they are anxious about their involvement with men. All the women's concerns centre around the issue of whether their daughter can distinguish between infatuation and real love. Mothers also worry about their daughter's ability to protect themselves from being taken advantage of by young men. Mothers believe that when their daughters are in their early teens they should not go out alone with a boyfriend. Mothers do not mind their daughters dating once they reach their 20s, because they consider them to be more assertive, conscious, and in control. However, the majority of mothers prefer their daughter to date in the company of their *shilla*,<sup>161</sup> crowd of friends. By teaching their daughters to protect themselves, mothers said that they educated their daughters to be proud of their body. This is what Hiba told her daughter:

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<sup>161</sup> It is considered to be a mixed group of friends. *Shilla* is an important structure in the lives of women. It is their major source of support, and protects women from society's negative attributes. *Shilla* is analogous to the notion of friendship that Gordon (1994) refers to in her work.

Be proud of your body. It is your body. Take care of it. Don't allow anyone to abuse it'. [Make] men feel they CAN'T have you – only when – IT IS VALUED [i.e. you're married]. I still talk like this 'Don't let go' [of your virginity]. In this matter– you can wait. You can wait – you don't have to let go (Hiba).

Mothers engage in a protective discourse when discussing issues of a sexual nature with their daughters. They strongly communicate to their daughters the need to be wary of men, since "men are only interested in one thing" (Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998, 7). Unfortunately, this serves to position their daughters as victims of men's natural and active sexuality, who want to jeopardize their daughter's physical and moral integrity. The disadvantage of this warning is that "such advice, while often based on real fears for their [daughter's] welfare, passes on very negative images of sex and sexuality"(Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998, 62). Moreover, this approach supports a passive model of female sexuality.

All mothers believe that their daughters should remain virgins until marriage, even if the mothers themselves have engaged in foreplay or premarital sex (partial penetration).<sup>162</sup> Their concern is (1) they don't want their daughters to be used and dumped, and (2) they want to protect their daughter's honour. In other words, even among egalitarian couples, the issue of honour and virginity remains important. However, the boundaries of family honour are more malleable than those of traditional families and lower income families (Jowkar 1986). Mothers also realise the significance of their daughter's attire. They are aware that most segments of society do not accept seeing women in shorts, sleeveless dresses and short skirts, even though the mothers did wear mini-skirts in their youth, but as these women say it was during a time when short dresses were the fashion, and wearing them was acceptable. Mothers tell their daughters to circumvent problems or harassment by not putting themselves in awkward

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<sup>162</sup> These mothers believed that foreplay and partial penetration is not sex, because sex entailed the male definition of sexual activity, full penetration Hite (1993).



positions. They should not wear clothes or act in a manner where they might place themselves in a predicament or cause a scene.

Generally, both the women and their husbands have open communication with their children. They listen to their children's needs and wishes; a change from the way they were brought up. In egalitarian relationships, both husband and wife struggle with their own changes in their gender roles, moving from a traditional one to a more flexible egalitarian prototype. However, as the example below illustrates, the couple try to deal with it

At some times I felt that I just wanted to forget about the house and the children and... at that time our social life was at its pinnacle. *Ya'ni* – everyday we either had a reception or a dinner or we wanted to invite - or something. So – so when you want to study you can't do all these things. So at one point I felt he [my husband] got upset. Once we were supposed to go out but I was tired I couldn't, because I used to wake up at three or four in the morning to work - if I had a paper I had to finish or something. So at one point I felt he got really upset and he said, "What's this we can't go out and I don't know what." But the next day he reprimands himself because he knows the weight of the work (Nadia).

Hiba realized that she couldn't always tell her husband she couldn't go out with him at night socializing, so she and her husband experimented and found a creative strategy to deal with the social demands of the get-togethers without compromising her need for seven hours of sleep. If she knows ahead of time that she and her husband have a social function that evening, she arranges her work schedule so that she can come home early and nap. However, she quickly said there are times when last minute invitations crop up

If I feel it is an important occasion I'll go – OK. But, as has happened many times – I tell my husband – I'll take my car and you take yours. If by 11pm I feel VERY tired, and I need to go back [home] – it's OK - I'll go back. So I take my car. I don't need to stay till 1 or 2am. It is a nice compromise. I can stay till



11pm. But if I have a full day of work the next day – I CAN'T stay up until 2 am! I won't be able to cope. I've done it several times and its OK. My friends have gotten used to this [routine]. They'll joke and say, "Ha – are the lights beginning to shut down?" [Implying that her eyes are fading because she's tired]. So I leave. My husband accepts the fact that I'm tired and need my sleep and I don't feel guilty that I'm ignoring him and not going out with him. This works well (Hiba).

Hiba and Nadia said that they are expected to accompany their husbands on visits. Their absence would be considered *'aib*, they would be perceived as dishonouring their husbands, and would allow others to gossip. Regardless of the type of marriage women were in, all professional married women encountered last minute invitations by friends and family, or encountered friends dropping by on the spur of the moment. I will discuss some of the women's creative strategies of dealing with this predicament under the section of the triple burden.

Now I will shift my attention to traditional marital relationships.

#### TRADITIONAL MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Traditional couples are experiencing a great deal of difficulty with the rapid pace of social changes in Jordan. They believe that the transformations are the source of cultural confusions and moral decay. Most of the women in this group are threatened by the changes in gender relations. It is as if a "cultural earthquake" is taking place (Skolnick 1991).

In traditional marital relationships, although the wives are professional career women, working full time, the household and childcare responsibilities remain strictly in their domain. According to the participants, their husbands refuse to help out, because it is "beneath their dignity", implying that gender roles are valued differently (Lips 1991). In reality, the husbands do not want to lose what they consider to be their "rightful" benefits, being pampered by their wives

(Hood 1983; Mohsen 1985). In this type of marriage, both husband and wife abide by the traditional gender roles. Her income is considered as non-essential (McDonald 1980; Thompson and Walker 1989). Women complained that although they spend their income on food, children's clothes and their clothes, their husbands considered their income as pocket money, rendering it inconsequential. Like the women in Mohsen (1985) and Safilios-Rothschild's (1976) studies, these women accept the lopsided deal because of their great desire to work and self-actualise. The women tend to be harried and stressed because of their huge burden, especially if they are mid-level managers and have no domestic helper. Most of the women work either as civil servants or lecturers at the state universities. Because of the many interruptions at work, they end up of having to bring their unfinished work home. To avoid problems with their husbands, the women usually end up waking up around four in the morning to catch up on their work while their family is asleep. These women tend to function on sleep deprivation. All talked about organising their time so as to meet all their obligations. They tended to categorize their activities into high priority or low priority activities

You budget your time and create a schedule so that you are accountable for every minute of your time. It creates an amount of stress – slightly nerve wracking. Your social life suffers. I mean you have to prioritise your life and your needs and you'll end up foregoing certain visits that you desire e.g. seeing your friends or neighbours. So you concentrate your time on important areas in your life. So if you really organise your time it is not really a problem (Widad).

Generally the women in these types of marriages label their husband as an "eastern" and avoid confronting them. The term eastern means that husbands have traditional views regarding gender relations, especially domestic responsibilities. Married women's avoidance of confrontation with their husbands indicates an acceptance of male dominance and women's difficulty in countering notions of proper femininity and honourable wife. Conservative-traditional women (veiled and

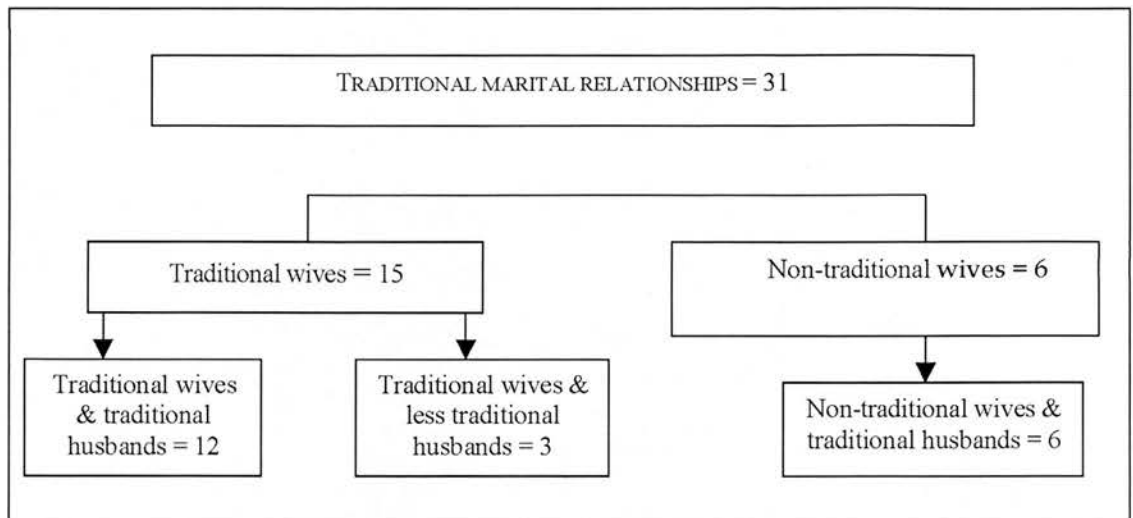
non-veiled) and Islamist women believe the husband should have the last word in the house, reflective of these women's collusion with the notion of male dominance. Within this framework, women have no right to upset the gendered power relations by asserting their own needs. Fear of angering their husband, and being perceived as *nashez* or recalcitrant, causes them to refrain from making any comments. Thus, women convince themselves that their behaviour is proper and the right thing to do.

Keeping in mind their husband's eastern mentality, the women try to ease any existing tension between them by skilfully articulating their viewpoint. They believe that if a woman knows how to approach her husband she can maintain the peace at home. The majority rely on slowly changing their husbands' minds when they want to do something that they know their husband would oppose. Their behaviour demonstrates their acceptance of their husband's power over them, and their need to reinforce his masculinity so as to sustain their relationship. When women decide not to upset their husband, they inadvertently relinquish control over their lives.

### THREE SUBTYPES OF TRADITIONAL MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

There are variations within the traditional marital relationships. First, there are those relationships where the husband is very traditional but the wife is non-traditional, where she consents to being solely responsible for childcare and household responsibilities because it is the only way her husband will agree to allow her to continue her professional career. In this relationship, a woman's professional career is her source of self-fulfilment, and she is not willing to give up her career. So she feels she has to accept her lot, if she is to maintain her marriage, her career and her honourable status within society (Mohsen 1985; Sherif 1999). Second, there are situations where the husband and wife share the conventional view of traditional gender

relations, and third, marriages where the wife is more traditional than her husband, this model applies to women who decide to veil later in life when they are over 35, usually against their husband's wishes. The diagram below is an illustration.



I will now examine the three main types of traditional marital relationships.

#### *Non-Traditional Wife and Traditional Husband*

The women in this category married for love. They tended to have liberal fathers, yet their husbands turned out to be very conventional with regard to gender relations. Most of the husbands finished their higher education in Western Europe and Northern America, but, according to their wives, the men held on to their eastern mentality. The women expected that their husbands would be more liberal given their exposure to western culture and western life styles. They all believed that, if their husbands had married a foreigner, they would help out in the domestic responsibilities because a foreign wife would expect him to. However, they noted, an eastern man expects his Arab wife to pamper him and take care of all of his needs. Thus, these women felt they were unable to press their case with their husbands because they were

going against cultural and religious conventions. The women agreed that even if their husbands were influenced by western culture, he would revert to his old habits, upon returning to Jordan, because of family and friends' influence and social pressures. The social structures continue to have a stronghold on the individual. This is how two of the women described their eastern husband

Let me tell you – for most of the eastern men – it is just natural that they don't like to help out at home. The home is the woman's domain. At the same time he'll tell you "I'm not asking you to work – you are the cause of your own feelings of being tired. I'm not asking you for anything. If you are tired – then stay at home." And so – he is not even willing to help out in the cleaning the dishes or sweeping the floor ... In order not to create a conflict that he has to help me in the house – that we both have equal responsibilities – I solved the issue by hiring help for the house. So I'm willing to work harder and I accept the additional burden and feeling tired so as not to have any problems with my husband. But he is supportive in his own quiet way. He doesn't nag. He'll accept anything I cook. So he makes my life easier in other ways (Widad).

Samar describes her husband as a difficult and typical eastern man

He is difficult but at the same time a typical eastern man. He is not violent but HIS rights come first. He feels that as long as he is the head of the family and he is providing, then he deserves to get all his rights completely fulfilled. This includes me taking care of the house, *ta'a* [being obedient] - that is - he has the first and last word (Samar).

Samar is in charge of the research and development department of her husband's company. However, her husband seems to forget that. Because she leaves the company around 3 in the afternoon,<sup>163</sup> her husband assumes that when she gets home she sits down and does nothing.

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<sup>163</sup> The government official working hours are from 8 am-2:30 pm, six days a week. Towards the end of my fieldwork, the work hours increased by one hour and a two day-weekend was instituted. So Samar was working full time in accordance with the official working hours.

Because I have a domestic helper – no! You CAN'T sit down.  
You're constantly running after the children. (Samar)

Samar has a six-month-old baby, a four and a six year old, and her invalid mother-in-law who refuses to allow the domestic helper to do anything for her. Her husband doesn't understand why Samar is so cold and tired at night, since she comes home early. At my third interview with her she was worried about her baby's health. She discovered that the domestic helper, who is responsible for feeding the baby in the morning, was not doing so. Consequently, her baby was losing weight and looking sickly. Her husband is oblivious to the work involved balancing between her professional duties and in caring for the children and his mother.

The women feel powerless to make radical changes because they are aware that the prevailing GPD in society supports their husband's position (Connell 1987) and believe in the gendered nature of work. For these women, their resistance is fragmented and is exercised at specific points in time within their life cycle (Okley 1991). For example, when Aya decided to go back to finish her master's degree, her husband created many obstacles for her, and she found herself needing to be accommodating, suppressing her agency, in order to finish her studies. There were times when she resorted to various techniques whereby she showed her husband the error of his ways, with the purpose of shaming him over his undermining tactics. She relied on indirect methods of confronting her husband. In this manner she was able to discipline her husband without losing her honourable standing in his eyes or in the eyes of society. I will discuss this at length under the section of controlling relationships.

Even though husbands agreed that their wife would continue working after marriage, the wives were made to feel indebted to their husbands for being able to continue working, as if the women were being granted special privileges.

The mere fact that he allows me to work implies that he acknowledges a woman's right to work – so I can overlook certain sensitive issues [his unwillingness to help out in the house]– otherwise – [slight pause] – I MUST accept this situation (Widad).

Widad doesn't dare complain about her difficulty coping with her paid work and household responsibilities because her husband would tell her to "quit" her job and stay home. Samar's remark is similar to Widad

If I start asking for a lot he'll just say "leave work" because he doesn't want me to make him feel that he owes me something. In other words, he doesn't want me to ask for too much (Samar).

In these cases, the husbands deal with what they perceive to be their wives' additional freedom by insisting that the private sphere remains the same. The conjugal bargain according to the husband can be stated as: "You can work. I am not preventing you, but you should not complain, because as an eastern man I am abdicating my rights, and am being liberal and open minded by granting you permission to work." The husband believes that his wife is supposed to devote herself to her home, even though he considers her work in the house invisible. The women are made to feel that their husbands sacrificed for them, when it is the women who are sacrificing because their initial conjugal agreement was based on the wife's ability to continue her professional career after marriage. However, the husbands turned the tables around, convincing the wives that they should consider themselves lucky to have such open-minded husbands. As stated earlier, the women want to work, so they agree to collude with their husbands against themselves.

The question one needs to ask is why are the women complicit in their inequality? It can be postulated that husbands capitalise and play on two socio-religious notions: complementarity and obedience. Lukes (1974, 24) argues that the

...most insidious exercise of power to prevent people....from having grievances by sharpening their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial.

Based on their socio-religious understanding of Islam MPEJW and their husbands believe that women must obey their husbands, and women's primary duty is their home. Hence, when husbands remind their wives of their need to obey or make their home life their first priority, they are acting in accordance to their habitus. As Connell (1987) and Bourdieu (1977) remind us, one's social circumstances and socialization are part of who we are. Both men and women have been socialized to believe that the two notions are the natural social order in Muslim-Arab life based on Qur'anic injunctions. Yet, as noted in chapter one there are various interpretations to The Qur'anic verse 4: 34. Therefore, how each person understands religious teaching does have a bearing on decision-making with reference to each person's share of household responsibilities, and the extent to which women feel they must obey their husbands whilst husbands feel they have the right to demand obedience from their wife.

I have discerned that women understand the notion of complementarity as the following: their primary duty is centred on their family's need, implying that they can work outside the home as long as their paid work does not interfere with their home life.<sup>164</sup> Husbands do not need to remind their wives of their primary duty, since the wives are aware of their responsibility and

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<sup>164</sup> My findings corroborate Cole's (1994) findings on *veiled* urban working Moroccan women.



follow through on their duties through their own self-censorship. Implied in the notion of obedience is women's duty to obey their husband, and create a peaceful home life. The women said that it is their duty to create a harmonious, peaceful and loving home environment.<sup>165</sup> The fact that their husband has a similar responsibility is ignored.<sup>166</sup> The majority said that by avoiding any conflict and disagreement with their husband they were able to create a harmonious environment. They hinted at their need to obey their husband. Thus, a reciprocal relationship is turned into a unidirectional relationship where the wife is expected to obey her husband's wishes.

It is clear that these women do not have a flexible and progressive interpretation of the Qur'an. A series of articles regarding women's rights in Islam were published in the local Arabic newspaper *Al-Rai*, written by Sheikh 'Izzidin Al-Khatib Al-Tammimi, the supreme judge and the King's advisor on religious matters, delineating women's rights and responsibilities in Islam. In his second article, Al-Tamimi makes it clear that a wife is neither a maid nor an employee of her husband; rather she is responsible for rearing the future generation in the principles of Islam.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Al-Shati (1999, 202) states that the signs of matrimony in Islam are affection, compassion, spiritual and mental compatibility, and a peaceful home. Wadud (1999) notes that within marriage, there should be harmony according to *sura* (4: 128), and mutuality built with love and mercy, according to *sura* (30:21).

<sup>166</sup> According to Fa'uri, "In Islam, there is a harmonization of rights and responsibilities between husband and wife, with the interests of the children taking priority" (1999, 22). Wadud (1999) stresses that the Qur'an makes it clear that a marital relationship is one of mutual dependency and equity.

<sup>167</sup> Al-Tamimi, 'Izzidin Al-Khatib (1999). *Huquq Al-Mar'a Wa Qadayaha Fi Al-Shari'a Al-Islamiyya* (2). *Al-Rai* newspaper, dated 7/11/1999.

## VEILING

The majority of women who are veiled<sup>168</sup> fall into the category of traditional wife. Not all veiled women are Islamists<sup>169</sup> (Taraki 1996, 152). Seikaly (1997) recognizes that the veil and Islamic dress may signify an individual's adherence to the new Islamic trends, but cautions that just because women veil, does not mean they are committed to all of the Islamist's ideologies. All but one of the veiled women I interviewed in my fieldwork, veiled willingly and out of conviction. Some even veiled against their parents' and husbands' wishes and were the first women to veil in their families. They came from middle to upper income families, where the veil was associated with poverty and poor education. Because veiling is considered an Islamic injunction, their families could not disapprove (Gole 1996; Jansen 1998). Women who veiled

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<sup>168</sup> Veiling among the middle to upper class and educated elite is a new phenomenon in Jordan. This is contrary to what Beck and Kiddie (1978, 8-9) and others note about veiling being primarily among the upper class. In Jordan, most of the veiled women were from the low urban areas. Their presence is gradually increasing. There is a cultural assumption that only uneducated, poor urban women veil, mainly to enable entry to the public sphere in an honourable fashion. I base my assumption on what I have heard from the veiled and non-veiled women in my research work, and from what I would hear around me. Educated professional veiled women in Jordan are perceived as the antithesis of modernity and progress as expressed by them. The studies on veiled women – an empowered political group- concentrates on the experience of Turkish women, Iranian women and Egyptian women. There is a dearth of information on the professional career oriented Jordanian Islamist woman. The experiences of Turkish, Iranian and Egyptian women cannot be compared to the Jordanian woman primarily because these countries have a history of female activism that is more than a century old. As a nascent state whose liberalization project was immobilized in the late 50s and resumed in 1989, women's politicisation came to an abrupt halt and did not resurface until 1992 (as is the case with all political parties). Secondly, the Iranians belong to a different religious sect, Shi'a whereas Jordan is a Sunni Muslim country. It is believed that the Shi'a are more open to *ijtihad* (open to reasoned discourse or it is considered to be the individual intellectual effort of understanding Islam – it is the process and act of interpretation) than the Sunni who falsely believe that the 'gates to *ijtihad* are closed'. Gole's work (1996) is predominantly on the newly urbanized Turkish women, whereas mine looks at established and well-known urban families, known for their secular albeit conservative life style. Jansen (1998) does not focus on the elite professional career women, and Stowasser, (1987a) and Taraki (1995, 1996) studies are not very recent. Afshar (1999) depicts Islamist women as progressive - implying that all the female Islamists are demanding changes that are feminist in orientation, which is not the case in Jordan. Gole (1996) reveals some internal conflicts among the women, highlighting the group's cognitive dissonance.

<sup>169</sup> I use the term Islamist to mean veiled women who are politically active in the Islamist movement. As for women who veil out of conviction and are not actively involved in politicising Islam, I resort to referring to them as veiled Muslim women. Not everyone makes the distinction between veiling and being Islamist. I found that very confusing.

against their husband's wishes belong to the category of traditional wife, less traditional husband. The veiled professional Jordanian women I interviewed made a deliberate personal choice how they wanted to express their religious convictions. By veiling, they actively redefine tradition and modernity, in a manner that is meaningful to them (Cole 1994).

According to a body of literature,<sup>170</sup> veiling is a political statement: the assertion of a woman's identity, empowerment and right to enter public space as an honourable woman. Through veiling, a woman redefines her social space in a mixed gender environment, hides her sexuality from the male gaze (men eligible to marry her), protects herself from sexual harassment, and strengthens her public moral code, establishes the Islamic gendered order, and recovers her cultural authenticity. Veiling is about Muslim women claiming their agency and embodies the struggle between two rival forces of individualism and communitarianism. Thus, veiling sanctions women's individuation and increases their decision-making power. For the veiled women I interviewed, many felt that they were no longer obliged to obey their family's and/or spouse's request as they used to. "My obedience is to God, and if my husband/father's request does not intervene with my duties and obligation as Muslim women, then I will strive to grant their request" was a common statement uttered by these women. Thus, it can be argued that as veiled women, they subvert the GPD and the notion of male supremacy.

## THE "NEW VEIL"

All the veiled participants I interviewed agreed that veiling was a "practical" outfit allowing them greater mobility, and providing them with physical and emotional security. Badran (1999)

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<sup>170</sup> Refer to Afshar (1999); Ask and Tjomsland (1998); Badran (1999); Cole (1994); El Guindi (1999); El-Solh and Mabro (1994); Gole (1996, 2000); Hale (1997); Hessini (1994); Kandiyoti (1991c); Karam (1998); MacLeod (1992); Mahmood (2001); Mernissi (1987a); Mir-Hosseini (1996); Moghadam (2000); Parla (2001); Sabbah (1984).

terms today's *hijab* as the "new veil" by comparing it with the veiling required of Egyptian women prior to 1923, which was in the form of a *niqab*, a face cover.<sup>171</sup> Gole (1996) notes that the new veil altered the conventional meaning of the *hijab* and with it gender symbolism. The *hijab* allowed women to emerge visibly into the public sphere as Muslim women and assume new roles as public activists, learning organizational and oratorical skills, and expanding their opportunities in the public realm. Both Jansen (1998) and Gole (1996) note that the women they interviewed held a different meaning of the veil from that of their mothers. In the case of the professional women I interviewed, most of the women were the first women in their families to veil. So, the obvious question to ask, is why did the women veil?

As noted earlier, veiling is part of their religious duty as proper Muslim women. They take pride in veiling, and it brings them a sense of security and inner peace. Veiling, they said, "Is a serious issue. Once a woman veils she should NOT remove it." Because of the seriousness of the matter, they said, they took their time before veiling. Most mentioned that they thought about veiling for years, and they had to be 100% sure and feel that the time was right for them to veil. I will quote at length Kafa's description of how she decided to take on the veil. Kafa, is in her early 50s, is a western educated professional with a Ph.D.

I started wearing it [veil] three years ago. I started to think about wearing it way before I actually put it on. I was convinced about it. I believed that it is the duty of a Muslim woman to cover her hair but I didn't have the courage to carry out my belief [the main reason that held me back]. First of all, I had advanced in my years and I got used to a certain life style. In addition, I was socially and professionally known as a woman who didn't cover her hair but as I paid attention to my

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<sup>171</sup> In 1923, Huda al-Sha'rawi and Saiza Nabarawi "announced the start of the feminism movement by a public unveiling of their faces in 1923 to symbolize the rejection of a culture of female segregation and domestic seclusion"(Badran 1999, 177). To these women and those who joined them, the *hijab* (in the form of the *niqab*) was un-Islamic. They considered it a patriarchal imposition in the name of Islam. By covering their heads only, Badran argues they modernized the *hijab*, in keeping with Islamic injunctions.

students while giving my lecture, I would say to myself “Oh, how lucky these young women who are veiled, they have fulfilled their [Islamic] duty, they started young and therefore, don’t have a problem right now.” So I started to contemplate the idea of the *hijab* but the turning point came when I went to the ‘*Umra*. [Religious pilgrimage to Mecca, where Muslims visit the holy sites. However, this pilgrimage does not count as fulfilling one’s Islamic duty since it is not done at the specific time of *Haj*. It is considered a minor pilgrimage]. I felt that I was in God’s hands, so I prayed to God to give me wisdom. I needed a push [and the ‘*Umra* was the push she needed]. So I came back from the ‘*Umra* with the intent of not taking off the *hijab*. Putting it on required self-determination and a strong will. After I wore it I started feeling an internal peace. Many people around me, especially my husband, tried to dissuade me. He said, “What do you want with it, you don’t really need it” but when he realised that I wanted to keep it on he left me alone. He said, “It is up to you.” My children also made comments “Mom what did you do to yourself? Why?” Now they got used to it and my daughter now is *muhajjaba* [wears the veil]. When I first wore the *hijab* women around me said, “I hope you don’t start trying to convert us.”.... Among my friends I’m the only woman to wear the *hijab* (Kafa).

Kafa’s husband was extremely distressed about her veiling and did not speak to her for several months.<sup>172</sup> Her act caused severe marital tension and for a while she feared her marriage might dissolve.

Just as single women complained of the male gaze, so did the professional veiled women complain of men’s eyes being fixated at their chest prior to veiling. The veil they said, “Forces men to recognize us as persons and not as sexual objects, it forces men to relate to us as human beings who possess thoughts, and allows for an exchange of ideas.” This is what Suhair, a 52-year-old woman, with a Ph.D. from the West, and veiled in her late 40s had to say:

In our [Islamic] culture, it is known – that this *hijab* – if anyone [referring to males] wants to come and look at me, he will

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<sup>172</sup> MacLeod notes that she came across husbands in Egypt who preferred that their wives did not veil (1992, 543). For the husbands their wife’s western attire denoted their modernity.

quickly realise that I am committed to Islam and I'm not a sex object. Also, most of my work is with men. I became aware that men look at a woman to assess whether she is beautiful, and their gaze focuses on particular aspects of a woman's body. For example, if I wore a blouse that had a bit of a low cut – he would not look at my face while I was talking to him but would stare at my chest – I started feeling uncomfortable. So I would think 'Why are you staring at those areas [my chest]? I am talking to you so you need to accept me – my mind and what I am saying to you.' So I found that when I covered those aspects of myself – he could no longer see them and he would start to pay attention to what I'm saying. So, yes, I am *muhajjaba* – but I feel very comfortable. Also, in our religion we have a certain code that we need to adhere to, and I feel that I'm complying to it. Secondly, the way I relate with people is a lot easier, they deal with me as a person with a mind, rather than a person with flesh, or something that they desire – especially men. Third, the *hijab* does not make any difference to me – it doesn't decrease or take away from my freedom to travel or to go to other cultures. So yes I do travel to other cultures and it is true their [people's] outward appearance does differ from mine. But differences between different groups of people are known and this does not mean that in order for them to accept me I need to look like them. No, we have certain teachings and they have their own teachings and everyone is free to do as they please. They may consider that wearing a mini skirt is normal – but I don't consider this normal – because of my culture, heritage and education – and this is what the *hijab* means to me (Suhair).

For Suhair, the *hijab* is a normal dress code that is part of her Islamic identity and Arab culture. The *hijab* does not limit her freedom – on the contrary it frees her from being the subject of male gaze and frees her from being sexually objectified. It forces people to pay attention to what she is saying and thinking – that she is no longer a sex object – but rather an individual with a mind. The *hijab* allows a woman to be seen as an instrument of communication, to speak to others and to have others respond to her as a person and not as a sexual being (Mohsen 1985). As Nawal Fa'uri said (personal interview July 2000)

The interaction is among human beings, among equals. It allows the exchanging of thoughts where both men and women are relating on the level of equal minds

For veiled women, the hijab allows a woman to resist society's perception of her as a sex object because, by wearing the hijab, she is forcing others to view her as a human being with valuable thoughts.

Morals and decency should be dominant when interacting with the opposite sex. We want it to be a civilized interaction, rather than an interaction with sexual overtones (Kafa).

Veiled women stressed that the purpose of the *hijab* is not to cover up one's hair but to remind one to act modestly, since it reminds the individual of the spiritual reason for wearing it. For them, the *hijab* imposes a certain kind of behavioural restraint on the woman to act modestly and the man to relate to the veiled woman as a person and not to sexualise and objectify her. Veiled women claimed that veiling allows them to focus their efforts on developing their minds rather than worrying about their physical appearance.

All veiled women mentioned that the *hijab* acts as deterrent, protecting men from the power of women's beauty and preventing men from being seduced by women. The *hijab* protects the society from *fitna* (social chaos) and keeps it pure. The conservative veiled women believe that when a woman goes out of her home unveiled she is encouraging the man to commit adultery. If we take this notion to its natural conclusion, the implication is that men are weak in the presence of women's beauty. Mernissi (1987a) and Sabbah (1984) claim that in a male dominated society it is unthinkable for men to accept the idea that they are weak in the presence of women, so to avoid this conclusion, the argument is turned against women, and society claims that women cannot be trusted because they are the ones who go out to seek vice. The authors claim that Arab society believes that once a woman has experienced sex, her sexual appetite is insatiable, and she becomes uncontrollable. I interpret veiled women's comments as being illustrative of the influence of popular Islam on their thinking: that women are instruments of seduction, and in the



company of the opposite sex they are the source of *fitna*.<sup>173</sup> Women's understanding of popular Islam has affected the way they perceive themselves (as well as the way men perceive women) on an unconscious level.<sup>174</sup> There is another side to veiling, leading to a circular argument.

#### THE PARADOX OF THE VEIL

Although veiled women repeatedly stated that the *hijab* provided them with self-respect and dignity, protected them from the "male gaze" (Moghadam 2001), and downplayed their female sexuality, rendering them asexual (Parla 2001), unbeknownst to them, its use has a paradoxical effect. When women try to desexualise themselves, unintentionally they perpetuate the ideology of women as a source of *fitna*. Thus, the *hijab* perpetuates the image of women as temptresses (Hessini 1994) and further objectifies women sexually (Gole 1996).

These veiled professional women are trying to portray themselves in public as respectable and honourable women. Veiling resonates with their own value system and their beliefs in the Qur'an. After all, they argue, it is the Qur'an that orders women to veil. Since Islam is above all social values, the undisputed word of God, following the Qur'an means that their honour and respect is undisputed. To gain a better understanding of how populist Islam has affected women's perception of themselves, I expand on the issue of veiled women and how they display their charms to their husband, as well as one woman's struggle with how an honourable veiled woman should dress.

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<sup>173</sup> Afshar (1999), Mernissi (1987a 1991), and Sabbah (1984), painstakingly make the point that interpretations of the Qur'an are "laden with centuries of historical androcentric reading and Arabo-Islamic cultural predilections" (Wadud 1999, ix).

<sup>174</sup> For an in-depth discussion on this matter refer to Sabbah (1984).



## VEILED WOMEN'S SEXUALITY

Traditional veiled women and Islamist women are convinced that it is morally wrong for a husband to be proud that other men consider his wife beautiful and attractive. This is what a woman had to say about her friend who felt uncomfortable wearing a bathing suit in public

She felt she was exposing her body and that was wrong. Her husband is of the liberated type – that enjoyed the fact that his wife was a beautiful woman in the eyes of society. If I were a husband and I felt that all the men were looking at my wife and desired her – what would my stand be? Why? I would accept this for myself? Would I accept someone to sexually harass my wife because he saw her and desired her?

She inferred that if other men found her friend beautiful that meant they desired her. To her, if a male stranger looked at her friend with a desirous look this implied that the stranger was challenging the husband's claim on his wife. The woman no longer belongs to her husband, but any man has the right to claim her. In her mind, once a woman is married, she is considered to be a man's property, and can only enter the public domain when veiled. She has difficulty with the notion that some husbands derive pleasure from knowing that men find their wife sexually attractive. To her this is wrong. Her statement is reflective of the veiled women and Islamist women's beliefs that a woman's beauty is solely for her husband's enjoyment and pleasure.

Farah dresses seductively at home and shows off her femininity to her husband. It is important to her that her husband finds her attractive. She is in tune with her husband's taste, and if he hints that he would like to see her in a particular outfit, she wears it the next day. She takes pride in looking attractive for her husband, and has certain outfits that she wears at home and others that are for work. She has ideas of what is appropriate to wear in public. Her emphasis on differentiating between the clothes she wears at home and at work and the amount and colour of

her make up is her attempt to reconcile what she perceives to be the Islamic notion of an honourable professional woman, and a sign of what she considers to be honourable behaviour of a veiled woman.

If my husband and I are going to stay home I have specific things that I wear. So what I wear outside my home differs from what I wear inside the house! I have specific outfits just for work. At home I do wear make-up, put on my earrings, perfume and do my hair. I have mini-skirts and open cut blouses. I do wear these at home. So now he gets to see me in a different look! I believe that the make-up one wears at home should differ from the make-up one wears at work. I think at work should be less. I would do this even if I were not veiled. I don't believe that a woman at work should be an instrument to attract people's attention; it is great to be dressed nicely [at work] but up to an extent. The lipstick colours I wear at home differ from what I put on when I go out! When we go out to a wedding party I'll wear lipstick. My husband likes when he comes home to see his wife elegantly dressed, wearing make-up, he likes my hair in a ponytail, and so I do a ponytail. I've never thought of this as a way to show my femininity! I mean when I go out to work I'm veiled. I either wear a pants suit or wear a loose long top with a high neck and long sleeves over my skirt. It's not logical for me to wear the same outfit at home! At home I'll wear cut [revealing outfits]. I like to and he likes it too. Sometimes he'll say 'It's been a long time since you've worn that outfit'. So I gather he would like me to wear it. So I'll do that the next day (Farah).

I was curious to find out whether veiled women had any desire to wear western style clothes. All the veiled women except one said that the thought never crosses their mind. Farah was the only veiled woman who shared her ambivalent feelings and her struggle with her urge to wear a T-shirt and shorts on the beach. Although those thoughts did occur, the *hijab* reminds her of her spiritual commitment and of her higher moral duty as a devout Muslim woman.

Let me tell you something about the *hijab*. The way we lived then [before veiling] was very different to the way we live now. Then, I couldn't wait to get to the beach and go jet skiing. My commitment to my convictions [*iltizam*] is what keeps me

wanting [determined] to continue wearing the veil. The other day we went to the Mövenpick, there was hardly anyone there. I almost wore my T-shirt and shorts and got into the water to swim but my conviction keeps me from falling back (Farah).

Now I return to the topic women's relationship with their husbands.

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH HUSBAND IN THE "TRADITIONAL WIFE, TRADITIONAL HUSBAND MODEL" AND/OR "NON-TRADITIONAL HUSBAND"

The difference between the two categories is that in the traditional wife/husband model, a husband was not opposed to his wife's veiling, yet there are women in such marriages who are not veiled. I did not note any major distinction between the professional women who were veiled and non-veiled. In the second model, the traditional wife and the less traditional husband, the husband was not expecting his wife to veil. The veiled women in this category talked about wearing swimming suits and going to sports club with their husband prior to veiling. Kafa's experience sums up the relationship traditional women (veiled and unveiled) have with their husband (traditional and less traditional).

My husband and men in general, give their profession the first priority. This is why I'm always very tired. As a woman it is my responsibility to create the balance between the family's needs and work needs. This is problematic at times and I don't think there is a solution to this dilemma. I am at times disturbed by it. Sometimes I find myself angry because I feel my husband is not giving his all to the family. However, from his point view, he doesn't feel that he is negligent towards his family responsibilities. He feels that he helps around the house. I don't feel that he puts in the same amount of work that I do around the house. I am putting more time and I work just as he does [talking with an angry tone of voice.] I doubt that we will ever reach the stage where men and women's responsibilities with regards to the house will ever be equal. Women will always have the greatest burden ... you end up having to steal some time from your work to keep up with demands of your home ... Given that you are the mother, the main household

responsibilities are yours. There is no way he will cook, he may help you with some of the food preparation but that is it. He may oversee the children's education but from afar but he doesn't like to teach them.... I end up having to listen to all [my children's] stories. The children will not go out shopping with their dad, only with me. He'll tell me that he'll help me organise the house, take the children places but he can't take over. I end up having to follow through on everything (Kafa).

Kafa is one of the few women who openly expressed her disgruntlement at the discrepancy between her share of household responsibilities and her husband's share. Although she believes in the complementary roles of husband and wife, she still expects her husband to give a fair share. In this respect her story is similar to what Duncombe and Marsden (1995); Coltrane (1998); Jamieson (1999) and others report. Unfortunately, when women continue to view the prevailing GPD as legitimate, the status quo remains (Lips 1991), so in a sense Kafa is contradicting herself. However, she is influenced by religious beliefs that urge her to stand by and support her husband.

It is a give and take relationship and not adversarial-antagonistic one where the woman needs to compete with the man because he is her enemy. As a Muslim woman it is my duty to be with family and care for them (Kafa).

Yet, as Hochschild and Machung (1989) note, women have ambivalent feelings regarding their double-shift. Kafa also complained that her husband left all the decision-making pertaining to the daily management of the house to her. By giving her implementing power, her husband in effect delegated the tedious tasks to his wife, off loading time-consuming activities to her (Pahl 1983; Safilios-Rothschild 1976). Kafa, however, was quick to note that when she decided to pursue her Ph.D., her husband supported her fully. Her husband appreciated all her efforts and was willing to stand by her (Jamieson 1999). She made it clear that she needed her husband's

support to balance her responsibilities as mother, wife, and career woman, and to deal with gossip

I say that when she [a wife] stands by him [her husband], then he will stand by her. I don't believe that a man will not recognise a woman's efforts and sacrifices – no way – no way. There will come a time that he will recognise and appreciate your sacrifices. If you have certain goals he will help you achieve them. He encouraged me. When I went through a phase in my first year of my Ph.D. where I felt insecure or down and didn't feel that I was going to make it – he said – “No, you will. Don't worry about the children, I'll take care of them.” He stood by me. Doing my Ph.D. was a struggle – I had my studies, my job and the house. In addition, you had people's gossip. They would say “Oh – at your age – why do you want to do this degree? You have your husband and your children” (Kafa).

Kafa did not perceive men as the enemy of women, but rather as caring persons, both thoughtful and loving.

Randa's experience was slightly different. When she decided to go back and get her masters degree, her husband was not enthusiastic. Randa was in her late 40s with teenage children. Her husband subtly tried to dissuade her. However, she chose to perceive his reaction in a positive light and referred to his support as neutral

When I went and applied at the university – my husband's attitude at the time was “why the hell do you need it? You don't need it. You are known [professionally]. You already have certain skills. You are just wasting your time and exhausting yourself unnecessarily.” I told him I really would like to. I was greatly influenced by a friend of mine who returned back to the university to get her masters. She enjoyed it because she stimulated her brain. Finally. My husband said ‘It is up to you!’ It was hectic – because my classes were in the evening from 5-8 pm. I'd come home exhausted. If you had company over or you had to go out at night I'd tell my husband “Please – in the name of God – let me lay down for a few minutes on my back to rest so I can go out with you.” He was neutral – but he wasn't too encouraging about the whole matter. ... Then we started to

build our house. It was very difficult because I had to go to the construction site, oversee the work and how it was progressing. I was going to snap. ... They [construction company] relied on me to choose the floor tiles the sinks and tubs so my education dragged on (Randa).

She said that her husband thought he was being liberal, because he didn't mind her working but, when she decided to extend her boundaries he was annoyed. He was struggling with the contradiction between the traditional ideology of a woman's place and the reality of women's needs in modern time. He didn't stop her, so she knew that it was up to her to balance her time. She was barely coping between her busy schedule and social life, but when their new house was under construction, her husband off loaded the time-consuming tasks to her, since they were supposedly in her domain. Consequently, she was over-stretched and her studies suffered. She was caught in the time-bind and her husband's career took precedence over hers. Randa was grateful for her husband's support while writing her thesis, because he told her to concentrate her time on writing, and not to worry about preparing elaborate meals, "he would eat anything". By being grateful, Randa was reinforcing the gendering nature of household activities. As Jamieson notes Randa was "still engaged on coping with or actively sustaining old inequalities rather than transforming them" (1999, 491).

#### WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL MARRIAGES AND RELATIONSHIP WITH OFFSPRING

Having examined the relationship of these women with their husbands, I turn to their views regarding a son's interference in a daughter's life. Within this category, mothers are pained by their sons interference in their daughters' lives, since they didn't raise them to be that way. These mothers are aware that peer pressure and cultural norms direct them to act in a chauvinistic manner towards their sister(s), because it is considered to be part of their responsibilities as brothers and young men (Joseph 1994a). There is a slight distinction between

the category of non-traditional wives and traditional wives. I will illustrate the case of Widad, a non-traditional wife married to a traditional husband, Widad's experience, and juxtapose it with the case of Kafa, a traditional wife married to a less traditional husband

I'm trying to raise them in a way that is different from the traditional gender roles. But what is ironic is that the environment is influencing them. For example, my sons now are trying to control their sister – they've been influenced from those around them. I'm surprised. I put my oldest son in a co-ed school. His female colleague is no different from him. I mean I teach him at home that he is not allowed to stay out late just as his sister is not allowed. Sometimes when his sister goes out into the garden they go crazy – their sister should remain in the house – as (young men) *shabab* they don't allow this behaviour. I mean even their father does not accept this behaviour. I have no idea where they come with these thoughts? Now my youngest –15-year-old – son hates to have me go to school to attend parent-teacher meetings. His friends tease him "Why doesn't your dad come"? I mean – no matter how hard you try – I know that you have a great deal of influence of course – but you can't discount the impact of the environment – those around my sons do influence them! ... One day I forbade my son to go out with his friends – they made fun of him because he listened to me – as if it is shameful for him to heed what this WOMAN said to him. I tell my sons "Mama,<sup>175</sup> just like you can go out – so can your sister." I keep reinforcing these messages but I am experiencing a great deal of difficulty I have no idea where these issues [counter resistance] are coming from? I mean the school environment and friends are extremely influential (Widad).

This account illustrates the influence of peer pressure on her sons. They have absorbed cultural messages that women are inferior to men consequently women's opinions should be discounted. Furthermore, part of the code of masculinity among young men is their need to control their sister's daily life. Widad laments that her sons were successful in influencing their father, who was somewhat protective of his daughter's rights, in preventing him from allowing their sister to

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<sup>175</sup> It is culturally common for mothers to address their sons as "mama" and for aunts to address their nieces and nephews as "auntie", it is their way to teach children the proper way to address people keeping in mind the hierarchical and kinship structures.



attend a mixed school. The brothers argued that they feared for their sister's well-being, since "they understand the male psyche." However, their underlying intentions were to protect their own reputation, which could be jeopardised if their sister decided to disobey her brothers.

They [sons] will try to convince their father – "Baba, [dad] because she is a girl, we are able to manage and take care of ourselves" [implying that their sister cannot]. I mean I wanted to enrol my daughter in the same school as them – but they absolutely, adamantly refused. I said: "You won't watch out for her?" "No" was their reply. "No, we don't want her to be with us." I asked them "Why?" They responded, "We are good and decent boys – but the others are not. We are afraid for her." My husband and I tried very hard but they absolutely refused. They were able to convince their father "Baba, there are many bad boys, they will face and encounter our sister and harm her" (Widad).

By convincing their father, the sons were able to reproduce the cultural notion that women should always be under the protection of their male guardian (Joseph 1994a). The father succumbed to his sons' pressure because he felt out of touch with the rapid social changes occurring around him, and relied on his sons' judgement because they knew more. The father handed over his paternal authority to his sons. As a non-traditional woman in a traditional marriage, Widad wanted more freedoms for her daughter, but she was out numbered. She said that her father was more open-minded than her husband and sons. She was not willing to push the boundaries because society was on her husband's side. She was pragmatic stressing that even when a woman wants to raise her sons differently, a wife needs her husband's support to do so. She was disappointed and frustrated that her sons and her husband were less progressive than her father.



I turn to Kafa's experience. Kafa's son also tries to control his two sisters, but she and her husband do not allow this. As Widad commented, a husband's support is crucial. Kafa believes that the reason her son tries to be domineering is related to the following:

It seems that young men have returned to the old mentality, they consider themselves as the young men in the house and the main watchdogs. His father and I will not allow him to step over his boundaries. The only thing he is allowed to do is to say [to us] "You don't know how to raise them." He doesn't try to take action. He'll comment to them or in front of us but I know that if the girls did anything wrong he would intervene. I know that his comments are uncalled for - perhaps he just wants to feel in control. So his interaction with them is not that of an older, loving brother; rather it is one where the older brother expects his sisters to wait on him and serve him – and - this relationship is not pleasant (Kafa).

Although Kafa does not allow her son to interfere with how her daughters are raised, she maintains the strict confines of the traditional GPD. Kafa relies on her older daughter to guide her youngest daughter. She is aware that her youngest is interested in boys and states, "that can be dangerous, you don't know what it will lead to." Kafa knows that her youngest daughter is influenced by the socio-cultural changes around her and considers her mother old-fashioned. To keep her grip over the youngest, she conveys her beliefs and attitudes indirectly through her oldest daughter. Because her youngest daughter listens to her older sister, her youngest is least likely to resist her. She notes, "my oldest is schooled in our ways of thinking, she can assist her sister."<sup>176</sup> When I asked her to elaborate, Kafa said,

For example, I'm not in favour of my youngest's outings to the coffee shops. She goes to a co-ed school, so it is only normal that if the girls want to go out, the boys will be there too! This means they will transfer this normal interaction [between the

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<sup>176</sup> As Taraki notes, Islamist discourse in Jordan presents ideal womanhood as veiled women who are perceived as being faithful to their home, husband and children, modest in their attire and conduct in public (1996, 143).

sexes] from the school to the coffee shops but the coffee shops are not a natural environment, given that you have students from the tenth grade there. A large number of her male classmates are now smoking cigarettes or the *huka* [hubbly bubbly/water pipe]. I don't know what they talk about [which is a matter of concern to her]. You can call me quite strict but I don't like them [girls and boys] sitting together in the coffee shops and then going out elsewhere in the evening. So my youngest daughter's argument is "Why can't I go when all of my other friends go out?" It is here that my oldest daughter helps me out. She'll say, "OK - you and I - and my [female] friends will go out together. This is considered to be the NORMAL type of interaction in our household; it is not necessary for us to have the young men with us. Although, I am in the university I still go out with my female friends, it is much more pleasant this way. If you are among males, you will know from the way they smile and laugh that they no longer respect you." So this is how the oldest helps me (Kafa).

Because societal norms frown on dating, she wants to protect her daughters from the negative influences of mixed interactions. Kafa is responding within the context of her moral, religious and social responsibility towards her daughters and is trying to influence her daughters given the available means. She makes her oldest daughter the gatekeeper of the youngest and relies on accepted social norms. She doesn't believe that her youngest daughter (and perhaps her oldest) will be able to control herself on a sexual level. Kafa is influenced by the *hadith* that if a man and woman are left alone the devil comes in between them

Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day must never be in privacy with a woman without their being a *mahram* [a person whom she cannot marry who can act as her chaperone] with her, for otherwise the devil will be the third person.<sup>177</sup>

Kafa said that the reason that she didn't want her daughter to be in the company of young men outside of the school environment was that interacting with the other sex was not practised in the family. As for her oldest daughter, by not secluding herself in the company of a single male,

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<sup>177</sup> *Hadith* authenticated by Ibn Hanbal; quoted in Ghazi Bin Muhammad, *Tribes of Jordan*, 1999, 34.

Kafa is protecting her daughter's honourable reputation. Kafa raised her daughter to believe that couples are happier in groups because they don't have to worry about gossip. The *shilla* protects her reputation, since she is never alone and never seen alone with a man. This is how Kafa dated her husband while they were in the university.<sup>178</sup> In Kafa's mind, she is protecting her daughters' honourable reputation and ensuring their virginity by protecting them from the dangers of unwanted sex. By preventing her youngest daughter from interacting with males in a crowd, and her oldest from dating, her daughters fail to acquire the skills and confidence in knowing how to negotiate their boundaries with men. This is evident given that a large number of married women complained of feeling disempowered and insecure as young adults in their initial encounters with the other sex. Parents therefore develop their daughters' intellectual empowerment - empower them to know how to think - but not their experiential empowerment, to know how to act (Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998).

Kafa tries to control her daughters under the guise of protection. Some might argue that she is not providing her daughters with the space to discover themselves, and that she treats her oldest daughter as if she were a minor who lacks common sense. However, Kafa is acting within her socio-cultural-religious paradigm. In addition, Kafa is reacting to the fast changes taking place in society due to globalisation. She is upset that local movie theatres and video rentals are allowed to show explicit sexual scenes. Kafa's attitude towards gender relations outside marriage portrays the interaction between a young man and a young woman as abnormal. Also, she is negating the possibility of a non-sexual/platonic friendship between a single man and woman.<sup>179</sup> If a young couple consciously decides to engage in premarital sex, its practice, according to Kafa's paradigm, deems sex sinister. For a large number of married women, it delayed them

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<sup>178</sup> Can be considered a form of practical dating.

<sup>179</sup> Davis (1993, 213) notes the distinction in Arabic between plutonic friendship known in Arabic as *sadiq*, and boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, which is known in Arabic as *sahib*.

from exercising their sexual agency early on in their marriage. Only two married women, who were in their early to mid 40s, said that it was their right to enjoy sex and they were teaching their husbands about their sexual needs.

Suhair is disturbed about the changes in the gender roles, and women's expanded choices and freedoms. Her need to control her daughter's life is indicative of her discomfort with change. Her need to protect her daughter has turned her into a complicit partner in perpetuating the traditional GPD. Her strategy is that her daughters have to abide by the set curfew hour and dress conservatively. Through the cellular phone, she maintains her strict surveillance over her adult offspring. In her mind it is up to her to set her children in the right path and maintain the honour of the family

Listen carefully, don't underestimate the influence of the home! Now, if I allow my daughter to go out to a nightclub and I don't know where she is until 3 am in the morning, then what kind of a home do I have? Every one of my children has a mobile so that I can constantly be able to know where they are! I will not allow my children to remain out of the house past 8 pm – their maximum is 9 pm. I'll ask my daughter "Where have you been? [I'll tell her] let's say you had a flat tyre - perhaps somebody tried to molest you – we are not like this mama – we are people who lock the house by 10 pm and everybody is expected to be home." I'm always inspecting. I am cautious. I want to know with whom they are going out with. How does she dress? (Suhair).

Fatima is a non-veiled traditional Muslim who is married to a traditional man. She feared that because of her daughter's education and work life, she would be unable to choose a suitable mate. Fatima feared that her daughter Suha would select a potential husband based on love and overlook important areas such as his ability to provide a comfortable standard of living, his social background, family name, and personal characteristics. In Fatima's mind, the exposure to western norms has caused young women to consider traditional marriages as backwards. Fatima

believes that her daughter's generation are spoilt and are unable to judge properly a man's personality because they are blinded by the notion of love. She is also fearful that the young generation want to be modern, and the only way they can do that is by abandoning their socio-cultural norms and beliefs. Fatima decided to pre-empt her daughter's folly by acting as her daughter's matchmaker

I, for example, married off my daughter in the traditional manner [I chose her partner], in spite of the fact that she is educated and now she is content and happy. I brought over this person [to my home] without informing her. She sat down with him and talked to him openly because she didn't suspect anything. She had just come back from the West and she sat down and conversed with him comfortably. It is not the same as telling her that this is your fiancé that you are talking to. I brought him over and created an atmosphere as if this were a regular social visit. Deep inside of me, I was hoping that he would pay us back another visit. I found that when he came over again, she couldn't wait to see him. Evaluating these matters is not easy, but it depends on the manner you use to approach this issue [your attitude]. Now they are married (Fatima).

Fatima was uncomfortable because her daughter had more choices and that she might harm herself by acting on them. She fears that the young generation are adopting new values without being aware of the ramifications. It is possible that Fatima does not believe that the younger generation is capable of making a serious decision based on sound judgement. She stressed that the success of her project was based on her "art of skilful communication."

Judge Taghrid Hikmat sums up married professional Jordanian women's concerns regarding how to raise their children in a fast changing world

Because we are modernizing and advancing with the times and we can't stand still in the face of these challenges. ... At the same time we need to protect and supervise our children, the young generation. This is crucial because the younger

generation in the West has experienced the change gradually ... We have no choice but to advance forward. In the case of the young generation, young men and women, what image do we want to portray to the young woman? Is it an image of a serious woman who wants to advance through her professional career? Through her hard work and perseverance and education to reach the decision making posts occupied by men armed with knowledge and high morals and behaviour? Or do we want to advance the image of a woman that is perpetuated in the [western] media who is embracing the bad and evil? ... In addition, the new values we are being exposed to are causing great conflict for us because we are caught between our current values and the rapid changes we are witnessing. I hope that we will be able to work and transcend these conflicts.

#### UNDERMINING AND CONTROLLING RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships did not start off as being controlling. They were egalitarian and traditional marital relationships. Both were content in their life choices. However, a shift occurred when the women decided to pursue their higher education or became successful professionals. These women shared in common one feature: their fathers were more open minded and liberal than their husbands. As young single women, they experienced unconditional support and love from their fathers, and they assumed their husbands shared their father's characteristic. The women found themselves not knowing how to deal with their husband's controlling behaviour. Yet, a husband's domination of his wife is not possible without some degree of compliance by his wife (Scott 1985). One reason why a wife allows her husband to dominate her is her misunderstanding of some of the teachings of Islam on a wife's obedience to her husband. As one Jordanian Islamist feminist noted:

Many people who experience injustice and remain silent and do not object because they falsely believe that this injustice is Islamic practice.

Some women falsely believe this implies obeying their husband all the time for fear they will be considered *nashez*. If she refuses to sleep with him, he may beat her. As many feminists have indicated, this interpretation is incorrect. A husband must resort to several tactics first before disciplining his wife. He may refrain from sexual intercourse with her for a while; not speak with her, and if all else fails, then may he hit her. What is implied is a gesture of physical discipline and not brutal or harsh physical discipline.<sup>180</sup>

Samar married her husband for love, but because she married against her parent's wishes, the power balance was in her husband's favour. She met her husband working at his company. She was in charge of the research and development while her husband marketed the product and managed the company. She talked about how supportive and loving her husband was during their courtship. He brought her flowers, took her out for lunch and they spent hours talking about the business and other matters. However, the relationship changed after marriage and especially after they had children. He was not as supportive and understanding as he used to be. She said that because they married for love, she did not expect him to change and felt hurt. She claimed that her husband believed that the management of the house was her domain. He was irritated that she was not creating new products all the time in the business, though she said she created nine new products at the beginning of the year. As she explained, a lot of research and testing goes into making a product, so coming up with new items is not easy. After expressing her disappointment with her husband I sensed she was uneasy about talking critically of him to a stranger. To counteract her criticism she said that he accommodated her work schedule to meet the needs of their children aged seven, five and a newborn infant. She then went on to say that her mother-in-law, an invalid, lived with them and required almost total care. She could barely keep up with the demands of her mother-in-law, bathing and dressing her, as well as the

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<sup>180</sup> According to a personal interview with Nawal Fa'uri in Summer of 2000.



demands of her children, although she has a domestic helper. Apparently, her mother-in-law wanted only Samar to help her out. She said that her husband was a good provider, but he would not give her the car to drive because he needed it, which meant that she had to rely on buses or taxis to get to where she needed to go with her three children

I have three children and a lot of bags to carry – this kid's clown, the other's toy! I hint to him that I want to buy a car for this reason only [lugging the children and all their belongings]. I mean I no longer can tolerate that after 12 years of working I still have to take a taxi and when I ask to have the car he is always saying that he is busy (Samar).

Unfortunately hinting did not get her anywhere. Samar is uncomfortable telling him directly that she needs to buy a car because being direct is unacceptable. As an honourable wife she is expected to be tolerant, handle pressure and not exhibit any signs of annoyance

I think a lot of the difficulty that we face as women has to do with the way we are raised! We were raised to handle a lot of pressure but for him [her husband] if he gets stressed, he can yell [it is socially acceptable]. If I get upset I can't allow myself to yell at home. A husband deserves respect and I can't yell. However, he gets excited and he'll yell and vent out his frustrations. I can't yell. Also, if I were to discharge my negativity by yelling, he will not accept it (Samar).

Samar is complicit in maintaining the double standards. She says she cannot express her frustrations because it would be a sign of disrespect. She is implying that it is acceptable for her husband to yell at her because he needs to vent his frustrations, but she should not. The hidden conjugal contract they both ascribe to states that she and her husband agree that she is expected to accommodate his needs. She believes she is challenging the normative order of gender-relations within the framework of an Islamic marriage by expressing her frustration. As a Muslim woman it is her religious obligation to follow her husband's wishes, since she mentioned several times throughout the interviews that a wife must obey her husband and ask



her husband's permission.<sup>181</sup> Samar is trapped in an unresolvable situation. First, she has accepted one of the androcentric versions of Qur'anic interpretations to be truthful. Second, it is not usual for a Jordanian woman to question the validity of the interpretation since the Qur'an is the word of God. Third, given that she cannot question what she is led to believe is the truth implies that she is not likely to examine or question the existing gender arrangements within her marriage. As Lips (1991, 11) notes "the first step in resisting someone else's power over oneself is to doubt and question the arrangements; but if that power is institutionalised, the doubting and questioning becomes more difficult and dangerous." Samar seems to be unaware that certain aspects of her relationship are controlling, especially when it comes to her use of the family car. When I asked her indirectly about the possibility of having the use of the car, like needing it to pay a friend a social visit because she recently gave birth, she responded

I asked him if I could have the car this afternoon, as I need to go shopping [for a gift]. "I don't know what will happen with me today" [was his response]. What is so frustrating is that you can't plan your life without going back to him first. For example, my girlfriend calls and says, "I would like to drop by and see you this afternoon," I can't say "Fine." I have to say, "Yes, I'll get back to you, let me see." I need to find out whether he objects or not, whether he has other plans. Maybe I'm talking too much [laughs nervously].

Samar is frustrated because she feels she has no control over her life. She cannot plan her activities and daily schedule without first having to ask her husband. She should be grateful that he allows her to go out and visit her family. Consequently, she is ambivalent about her marital relationship and expresses her discontent indirectly to her husband in this manner

...one's marital contract needs to be renewed annually [laughing]. I express my objections in this way. Sometimes he

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<sup>181</sup> Al Khayayat (1992) in her interviews with Iraqi women notes that most of wives believed that a woman is better off obeying her husband.

laughs. Sometimes he gets disturbed! There is a problem for women when it comes to marital contracts, that is, they are for life and if you try to get out of it under the current circumstances, you lose. If it were a temporary contract renewed every year, then you can evaluate it and decide whether it is worth renewing or not (Samar).

Samar indicates that her husband subscribes to the position that he is an excellent husband because he is a good provider. The view that men equate their role as provider to their performance as husband is a common one (Hochschild 1997; Thompson and Walker 1989). Jamieson (1998) distinguishes between “disclosing intimacy” where one shares her/his thoughts and feelings to another person and “mutual intimacy” where both partners equally participate in sharing their feelings and thoughts. The latter form of intimacy can only take place when the structural inequalities are eliminated. This is the type of intimacy Samar is yearning for in her marriage.

If you were able to ask him how he perceives himself as a husband, he'll probably say he is the best, he is financially providing for the family. My husband believes that the husband's duty is mainly to provide for his family. Second, it is to spend time with his children, which he does. He comes home at 6-6:30 and spends time with them. He takes them out for vacations. He tries to get them whatever they dream of.

Samar is unhappy and dissatisfied with her current situation. She recognizes that her husband is a good father and provider, but her emotional needs are not being met. She feels she cannot complain for fear that her husband will perceive her or even label her as *nashez*, which has social and religious ramifications.<sup>182</sup> A woman who is *nashez*<sup>183</sup> is no longer entitled to her *nafaqa*.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Joseph (1994a, 57) argued that a Muslim marriage leaves women vulnerable because the structure of marriage is precarious given that men can divorce at will. El-Baz (1997) argues that men have used their unilateral right of divorce to threaten their wives, even if they did not act on their threat.

<sup>183</sup> Nasir (1990) quoted in Afshar (1999, 142) defines *nushuz* as “the wife working against her husband's wishes.” Afshar as well as Fa'uri (personal interview) make it clear that the notion of *nushuz* applies to both men and women.

This means that her husband is no longer obliged financially to take care of her. Socially, it is shameful if a woman is perceived to be *nashez*, because she dishonours herself and her natal family. In the eyes of the public she has veered from the path of God and is seen as causing her husband unnecessary grievance. If her husband were to divorce her because of her disobedience, it would be her fault. Samar has no property in her name even though she contributes to the house payments. In the case of divorce, the property she and her husband have amassed would not be divided equally, between them since it is in his name.<sup>185</sup> She is at a disadvantage because her father and brothers could not exert any pressure on her husband since they are not on good terms. Her fall back position, the social stigma of being *nashez*, poor local economy because of the unstable political situation and her understanding of what is meant in Islam by “obeying” her husband, caused her to believe she has limited choices. Another possible factor that she did not articulate that might have influenced her decision-making is her fear that her husband might take on a second wife without her knowledge.<sup>186</sup>

May has a demanding job as a director of an NGO. Her husband is proud of her professional accomplishments. Yet, like western professional women, if the children’s school grades are not high in all subjects, or the house is not as tidy as he would like it to be, he blames her (Hochschild and Machung 1989). May married her husband for love. At the beginning of their

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<sup>184</sup> Her allowance, money that she needs. This is analogous to what is considered in the West to be a woman’s alimony in the case of divorce. This has nothing to do with what her children need.

<sup>185</sup> The law and the manner in which it is interpreted favours men (MacKinnon 1983). No attempt as of yet has been made to divide the property between husband and wife upon divorce. The covert bargain between the State and male elites/heads of household remains intact (Kandiyoti 2001). This is also an example of how the state regulates and controls marriage (Pahl 1989).

<sup>186</sup> At the time of my fieldwork, husbands were allowed to take on a second, and/or third or fourth wife without the knowledge of the first wife or the second wife. According to Amendments to personal Status Law Provisional Law No. 82 as submitted in 2001 and temporarily approved by the Senate on Dec, 13, 2001 states in 1(c) “The court and according to the new amendment to the personal status law should inform the first wife of the husband’s second marriage. Moreover, the second wife should also be informed of the husband’s first marriage.”

marriage, her husband helped her out with the care of their first two children. By the time they had their third child, he was unable to help out because of the increased demands of his work. May's work demands also increased. This shifted their relationship temporarily from an egalitarian one, to one of control.

She mentioned that the minute she returns home after work she helps her three children with their homework. By 9 pm she is exhausted and fast asleep. Her husband found her early retirement to bed infringed on his time with her. May said her husband doesn't realize that she is the one around the children all the time, stopping their fights, and driving them to and from their functions, which saps her energy. He is only around them for a couple of hours and plays with them. On the other hand, she has to deal with all issues related to her children's daily needs as well as her professional career. Like married western professional women, May is trying to juggle between her children's needs, her husband's demands for more attention, and her obligation to her paid work (Duncombe and Marsden 1995; Hochschild 1997). Her husband's problem with May's early sleeping hours may be because he feels that she is not giving him the attention he is used to, and feels resentful. He accused her of neglecting him. His need to have her around him full of energy led him one day to tell her "I'll pay your organization your salary as the director, but just stay at home. I'll DONATE that money." Eventually one day he gave her an ultimatum, either "me or your work."

It is her husband who insisted that she put her masters degree to full use. They discussed their difficulties, and she decided to try to take a nap when she got home from work so that she would have more energy in the evening. However, it was not always possible. She mentioned that at one point the tension between her and her husband reached such an impasse that her father had

to intervene.<sup>187</sup> Eventually, the couple overcame the hurdle. Her major dilemma is that she is candid with her husband and expresses her opinion clearly. She wondered whether she would experience less difficulty with her husband if she were skilful in the art of communication. By this she implied that if she were able to slowly introduce ideas to her husband and did not confront her husband, she would be less frustrated. Being direct did not work in her favour because her husband is not accustomed to the idea of a wife being confrontational and direct. For him, May's style of interaction falls outside the bounds of traditional gender relationships<sup>188</sup> (Al-Khayyat 1990). Although her husband was willing to share with household chores, cook and organise the kitchen, he was unable to deal with his wife's direct mode of interaction and her less than full attention to him. Her husband had not fully comprehended the demands a career puts on a married woman.

May contemplated divorce because of these unresolved differences. Although she had her father's support, her desire to have her marriage succeed prevented her from asking for a divorce. At the same time she said that she could not live without her work. When she enters her workplace, she forgets about everything else around her. She went on to say, "Please don't misunderstand me, I LOVE my husband and children. They are very important to me, but so is my work. I can't survive without it!"

May has a difficult road ahead of her if her husband is unable to come to terms with the reality of life for a dual-earning couple. Dual-earning couples in the West are still grappling with this issue, and women still seem to be disadvantaged since the bulk of the household responsibilities are left in her domain (Steil 1997). This is even more challenging for the Jordanian professional

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<sup>187</sup> Family and friends play a crucial role in promoting marital stability (Singerman 1995; Watson 1994).

<sup>188</sup> Al-Khayyat's (1992) study reveals that the married Iraqi women she interviewed perceived obedience a better option than being assertive.

woman since society is still grappling with idea of whether women should work in the first place (El Guindi 1999; Hanssen-Bauer, Pederson et al. 1998; UNICEF 1997).

Aya married her husband, Ibrahim, for love. She met him when both were students at the A.U.C (American University of Cairo). She was doing her BA and her husband was finishing his masters. He wanted to marry Aya and her father agreed on condition that her husband would give her the opportunity to pursue her university degree in the near future. Aya moved with her husband to Western Europe while he worked on his PhD. During that time she gave birth to their first child. Shortly after his graduation they returned to Amman and their second child was born. After enrolling at University of Jordan to complete her BA, her studies were placed on hold, six months prior to her graduation because of her daughter's serious illness. By the time she was ready to finish her studies she was pregnant with twins and decided to wait until they were in school. When her twins started their second year of school she returned to the University of Jordan to enrol, and was informed that she had to redo her courses because of the time lapse.

Aya decided to enrol in the same university her daughter was attending. When she told her husband about her plans to go back and finish her bachelor degree, he responded, "Don't be stupid - you have four children. This is no time to study." She reminded him that she sacrificed her studies so that he could finish his, and now it was her turn. She said, "Now, it is your turn to sacrifice" and he responded, "Don't be stupid!" She went on to say,

I was very, very UPSET. I felt that when I sacrificed, I did it in a manner that my family always came first. Since I committed to my family, then I follow through on my commitment, this is my type. I never left my children to the supervision of the woman who worked in the house. I was the one who raised them. I always fulfilled my duties towards my husband and my children (Aya).

She shared her story with her father the next day. "He encouraged me to go along with the situation, to acclimate", and gave her a signed blank check to enrol at the university. He told her that he would pay for all of her educational expenses. "Without his support I wouldn't have made it." When she returned home she called her husband and told him

Say *mabruk* [congratulations]. He said, "Congratulations, for what?" I said, "I am now a student at YY University ... " He said, "Are you crazy? You have lots of responsibilities!" I said, "I never had any shortcomings with respect to your needs or my children. And, I've always known what my priorities are. I can manage my affairs." I said, "Do you remember last night; you said I'm crazy and stupid, I remained quiet. But I was insulted because you did not encourage me. But I encouraged you to attain many matters. I have my identity card in my hand." He said, "You're crazy" (Aya).

Aya chose to exercise her agency and pursue her degree. She did what she felt she needed to do to accomplish her goal and then informed her husband, by invoking the strategy of *fait accompli*. However, this did not mean that it was easy for her after that. Her husband proved to be uncooperative.

Whenever she had exams, he would invite people over to the house. For the sake of her children, she remained silent and did not clash with him. She ignored his games and pretended that nothing unusual was happening. She organized her time by cooking a few days ahead to make sure the meal was superb. This way she fulfilled her duties as an honourable wife and did not disgrace her husband in the eyes of people.<sup>189</sup>

I don't want anyone to make my husband feel that I was negligent in my household duties. So it was a challenge because I wanted to have everything TOP [perfect] when people came over for dinner (Aya).

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<sup>189</sup> A gracious host gains "symbolic capital" gains social esteem and increases her/his honourable standing in society (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).



Aya did not want to give her husband any opportunity to criticize her for being negligent. By being the perfect hostess, she silenced her husband. In addition, her husband expected her to be angry, yet she surprised him by being cheerful, loving and gracious. She said that she shamed her husband, made him feel remorseful and guilty, so that in the future he would think twice before acting childishly. Unfortunately, her strategy was at the expense of her sleep. Instead of sleeping seven to eight hours every night, she slept two or three hours. She deprived herself of sleep to balance her duties as a wife and mother. She considered her husband's resistance to her education as a personal challenge, and set herself up to be a role model not only to her offspring, but also to the other students in the university

As a role model, an older woman, a mother figure I couldn't have lower grades than the students. I had to set an example to them. This was a challenge. Also I wanted to have high grades so as to encourage my children to study and make high grades too! I'm a perfectionist, which is one of my negative traits.

The university professors respected her because she was mature and was hard working. To keep up with the demands of her education, she would study between classes during the day and late at night when her family was asleep. As a mature student, who was out of academia for 20 years, she recognised her need to work hard. Aya progressed well in her studies and noted her husband's jealousy towards her because she was doing something for herself, rather than completely devoting her time and energy to him.

After working diligently for three and a half years, Aya invited all her professors to her house for dinner to celebrate the completion of her course work for her bachelor degree. The day after her dinner celebration she went to the registrar's office to pick up her degree, but was told that she wasn't eligible because she had failed one course. Aya was stunned, because she all her grades



were in the top percentile. So she went to the president's office to find out what had happened.

The president informed her

Your professor has refused to pass you and we don't have the authority to raise your grade. We don't know why he did this (president).

The dean of her department convinced her to retake the course. He also told her

We had another professor who corrected your exam and he said you passed with a high grade. We don't have the authority to change the grade because he [the professor who failed her] is in charge of his subject' ... I cried bitterly in the room by myself wondering why the man failed me.

She agreed to retake the course on the condition that the professor who failed her would not grade her exams. Aya was determined to find out what motivated her professor to give her a failing grade

It turned out that he [the professor] wanted to gain my husband's confidence.

Ibrahim was a friend of her professor, and asked him to fail Aya. Aya believes that her husband was jealous and was angry with her for going behind his back and registering at the university. However, the main reason her husband attempted to prevent Aya from graduating had to do with his fear of losing his wife

I look at this whole affair in a positive light. I consider him to be fearful of my 'self-independence' because I am known for my independence, that if one day I found that dealing with him is hard I would leave him. Now this is beginning to surface because he'll ask me "Aya, will you leave me?" I say – "No, I will not. And I have children from you and if your behaviour improves, I'll love you more." Now he is behaving much better. I know that he is reacting to some of his childhood issues because as the youngest he was adversely affected by the poor

relationship his father had with his mom. Had it not been for my studies in psychology, though I don't have a degree in it, I wouldn't be able to deal with him (Aya).

Culturally, a married woman of her age and social status is expected to be a homemaker, devoting herself to her husband. If she does work, it is expected that she would be volunteering her time for a good social cause (El Guindi 1999). Her family perceived her behaviour as atypical since her husband is well established socially and financially. She said,

Of course society [doesn't help either] is not merciful either, especially when you are doing things that people are not used to ... A woman who gets married, loses out [i.e. cannot act in a manner that is considered to be against cultural norms and expectations]. She needs to stay home and care for her children (Aya).

She goes on to say that perhaps this is the reason that she finds herself feeling torn

You find yourself struggling within yourself because your moral values and beliefs may differ from that of society (Aya).

Given the psychosocial background of her husband's upbringing, the notion that upper class women don't work (El Guindi 1999; el-Messiri 1978), and the belief that a wife must obtain her husband's permission, Aya's agentic activity pursuing her degree threatened Ibrahim and pushed the relationship into one that was undermining and controlling. Ibrahim was threatened by his wife's independence and believed that one day she would walk out on him. The only way he could prevent her from leaving him was to prevent her from earning a degree, which would enable her to live independently.

Aya chose not to confront her husband regarding his role in failing the course. She remained silent on the subject. She does not believe in confrontation, because it destabilizes the family and it is her belief that a mother is the pillar of the family. She adapted to the situation and developed

a strategy that would fit her current predicament. She did not fully disempower herself, because she realised that in confronting her husband the arguments would escalate into irreconcilable differences and perhaps to divorce – a situation that is problematic for women in Jordan.<sup>190</sup> Divorce implies that she is to blame, she is a failure, and she loses social support, respect and social status, which adversely affects her reputation as an honourable wife and affects the future of her offspring. Aya believes that a woman needs to be flexible and easygoing. She is aware that her husband is affected by the androcentric interpretation of the Qur'anic verse (4:34) that deals with notion a man is *qawamuna' ala al nissa'* i.e. a man has authority over women, he orders and controls them, whereas she believes the verse means a man is a guardian and protector of women. She stated that had her mother-in-law remained alive she would have been able to convince her husband that his ways were wrong.

Aya gave her husband the message that “yes you may try to create obstacles, but you will not succeed in demoralizing or disempowering me.” She stood up to him in a non-confrontational way, which is more powerful than direct confrontation in her socio-cultural context. By not responding to her husband's provocations, she rendered her husband powerless to offend her or react to her (McCallum 1999). Her act of self-control is one of her tools of power.

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<sup>190</sup> This is what she had to say about the Arab woman's rights in divorce cases “[her rights] are not stipulated in the Islamic Jurisprudence. So where is the Arab woman who was pampered and respected as a mother and wife - is all of a sudden out in the street once she is divorced? Where is her respect? She only gets *nafaqa* (alimony) for 3 months?” In other words she is aware that she is very disadvantaged in the case of a divorce, because she may find herself out on the street without a roof over her head, and without financial support after 3 months of being divorced. The new amendments in the Personal Status Laws, Provisional Law No. 82 for 2001, Amending the Personal Status Law, states, “The wife and according to article 134 can now request compensation if divorced or repudiated arbitrarily and without just cause while retaining all her other matrimonial rights. The judge may grant her whatever sum he deems appropriate.” The caveat in the law is that the amount a husband should pay is dependent on the judge, who is usually male and tends to be male biased as McKinnon (1983) notes in her research.

Aya graduated, started her business and went on to obtain her masters. This time she invoked the strategy of partial compliance to gain his approval

Three months before registering for the masters course we went out together. I showed him my feelings toward him and said, "I know you will back me up because I know you respect knowledge." I capitalized on his weak points. "And I know you always encourage education. If I told you that I would like to register," I did not tell him that I registered because there are matters where you have to be extremely diplomatic, I told him, "I would like to self-actualise, and continue my studies and get my masters and doctorate." He said, "All at one time?" I said, "Yes, you are now in Bahrain and you spend a lot of time there. And I have always spent my time with the children and I can study with them. In addition I am filling up my time in your absence. And at the same time the way I fill up my time is very positive for you, for me and the children ... I've decided, but I won't take the step until you say O.K. And instead of getting on your case let me get involved in my studies." I approached him in a very smooth way. And he was aware that I was rational ... He felt that I related to him and that I'm not willing to make a decision without his approval. So he felt that I respected him and he approved. ... A week later I told him that I had already registered before I had talked to him but that I couldn't tell him that because he would feel that I was challenging him and we would repeat our history of my BA. degree. Anyway we are mature adults and we each know what we want I told him. So he laughed and he said, "You're so strong, you always do this" (Aya).

Aware of her unequal bargaining power and positioning, Aya attempted to balance her limited options given the resources at her disposal (Agarwal 1997; Sen 1990; Wiener 1982). She thought about the method to approach her husband and decided to speak to him three months in advance, in case her plan failed. This way she would have enough time to gradually convince him to accept her of furthering her studies.<sup>191</sup> From her experience, she learned that she needed to show him how much she cared for his opinion and his consent.<sup>192</sup> By attempting to conform to the

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<sup>191</sup> This is the strategy I call preparing the ground.

<sup>192</sup> She was aware of the law of unintended consequences: certain acts may backfire and produce the opposite of what was intended (Scott 1985).

minimal standards of behaviour by an honourable wife, she used the strategy of partial compliance. Aya tried to accommodate her husband's needs. She was able to forge her way through without displeasing him by appearing to follow the cultural norm of gaining prior permission. In addition, she appealed to his love for knowledge.<sup>193</sup> She was proud of her ability to talk to her husband and succeed in convincing him. To quote her "I used to fight it in a smooth and flexible manner and not with force. I would fight back with logic, rationality, clarity and openness." Aya protected her fall back position (Agarwal 1997) by gaining her children's approval prior to approaching her husband. She capitalized on her connective bonds (Joseph 1999a) with her children. I will end this section by quoting the way she perceives her strategy

In my opinion, men and women complement one another, they are not enemies. One of the ways I was able to convince him to give me his support for my masters is by telling him "I am not competing with you. I complement you. The better I become, the more you gain and improve." This is a man's weak point, if he perceives you as competing with him on the level of education, knowledge, social status, [he is likely to feel threatened] it is within a man's nature to dislike a woman whom he feels is trying to surpass him. [I told him] 'I am not above you, rather you are better than me in some areas and I'm better than you in others. We complement one another, we are NOT competing against one another.' From the minute I articulated this to him, he started to take it easy and his jealousy began to subside gradually. You have to adopt a certain style when dealing with a man, because we are a traditional and conservative society. My husband was raised in a home where his paternal aunts ... lived with his parents, siblings and him. His father always considered the boys better than the girls. Whereas in my family, boys and girls were seen and treated as equals. This was a source of internal struggle for me before we got married. I am being completely honest with you because it is very important for your research to hear the truth and know how I think (Aya).

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<sup>193</sup> She acted on the "triadic relation" involving the connection of action, desire and belief (Elster 1983; quoted in Korpi 1985, 32).

Aya's situation differed from Samar's. Firstly, Aya is financially independent because after her father died he left her money and property in her name. Secondly, her father paid for her educational expenses while she was doing her MA. Thirdly, her husband did not back down on his promise to allow his wife to pursue her education.

In the controlling/undermining marriages, the husbands psychologically want their wife to be their equal (in education and professional career), but, emotionally they are unable to handle the situation because of their socialisation. They were socialised into the belief that to be a man means to dominate women. However, in an egalitarian relationship there is no place for dominance (Jamieson 1998), so a husband deals with the unresolved tension by undermining a wife. In a traditional marital relationship, as long as women maintained conventional roles within the house, the husbands did not experience any conflict. However, when roles started to change, the husband's sense of masculinity was undermined.

## MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENTS: LOVE VS. RATIONAL MARRIAGES

Many believe that love is a pre-requisite before marriage, but this does not guarantee happiness. Many times this is the opposite. ... Even if you love somebody you need to think ... Is he financially responsible for other members of his family or is he free of financial obligations? These all have to be taken into consideration. Love is not everything. It is only a part of the total picture (Fatima).

Altorki (1986, 137) charts changes in traditional marriage arrangements in Saudi Arabia among elite single women. She notes that these women are actively involved in the decision making process of their marriage. Her work demonstrates a shift from arranged marriages<sup>194</sup> to a

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<sup>194</sup> Arranged marriages are not necessarily forced marriages. (On this point refer to Tucker 1993, 196-197). A large number of the women (single and married) I interviewed stated that arranged marriages are not necessarily wrong.

situation where young women have a say in the selection of their marriage partner. Over half of the women I interviewed said they married for love.<sup>195</sup> The remaining women described their marriage as *zawaj 'aqlani* – “rational marriage.”

In rational marriages, women choose their mate based on his personal characteristics, family background, and educational standards which they glean through brief encounters ranging anywhere from one to two meetings in the woman's home, up to several meetings over a period of two to three months. The women believe that love will develop later in their marriage, though they wistfully commented that they missed out on the sensation of falling in love. Women in rational marriages were cognisant of the mounting social pressure to marry. They chose their mate with a clear head and steady nerve, as if they were engaging in a business transaction. To justify their choice of partner, they agreed that in a rational marriage, “you are aware of what you are getting into. You know your limits and what you will and will not accept.” They believe that women who marry for love are blinded by love and fail to notice unpleasant qualities in their mate, which may later turn out to be detrimental to the marriage. They brought up the high divorce rate in Western Europe and the US to justify their support for rational marriages.

#### FEMALE-MALE RELATIONSHIPS

The majority of women believe that relationships between young adult females and males must be of a serious nature and not casual or carefree. They had difficulties with a casual or plutonic

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<sup>195</sup> Altorki (1986, 137) stated that the women she interviewed rarely said they married for love, since love implies “a clandestine relationship before marriage.” Consequently a marriage based on love is considered unacceptable because a woman admits to transgressing the code of modesty and honour. The elite Saudi women based their choice of partner based on his character. Mohsen (1985, 58-59) notes a different situation for the upper-middle-class professional woman. She notes that marriage for love is gaining popularity among this group. Davis (1993) also traces changes in gender relations and the desire of young adults in Morocco to get to know their potential mate before marriage.



relationship with a man, going out just for the sake of companionship or to have fun. In their minds, casual relationships are undignified and indecent because of the implication that sex is involved.

Relationships are more serious and ... here [in Jordan] it is different from an outside [western] society. It is going to lead to marriage. It is not like just dating, something casual (Sana').

Single and married women said that their parents would not allow them to have a boyfriend. A clear distinction was made between having male friends (*sahib*) and having a boyfriend (*sadiq*).<sup>196</sup>

We were raised to always be careful [around boys]. We were not raised to accept this notion of boyfriend – girlfriend. It is OK to have male friends – but your friendship would progress to a certain limit. You remain reluctant and fearful of entering into the experiment of boyfriend–girlfriend (Lama).

Parents assume that young women will be unable to determine whether their boyfriend is good for them or not, hence these types of relationships are frowned upon. Women who wanted to date circumvented one-to-one dating by going out with the *shilla*. The *shilla* acts as a camouflage. The couple sit at the end of the table conversing while being perceived as belonging to the group. Women's strategy of partial compliance works to their advantage because dating within the *shilla* maintains their honourability. However, a large number of married women admitted feeling disadvantaged because they were not allowed to date. Some mentioned they lacked the tools to properly evaluate the character of their potential mate because they lacked experience with the other sex and were unable to compare their potential mate to other men

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<sup>196</sup> Davis notes similar remarks by young adults in Morocco (1993, 213).



I was so confused – as I told you – we were without experience. We had no way of comparing this man with any other since we really hadn't met any. I mean the men at the campus were immature and kids! So there was no way for me to learn what it was like to meet and interact with men (Nadia).

I sensed from a few women their regret of their choice of partner. I will clarify my point with an example

But I think this way of thinking [no dating] is wrong. If I have daughters – I would not stop them from dating. They need to go out and learn. A woman by the age of 18 is capable of knowing right from wrong. So, what's the big deal if she makes a mistake? I wish I went out and dated and made mistakes – rather than being inexperienced and dumb! ... [In] this time and age - this kind of upbringing is not good. I should be stronger, more daring, I want my daughter to be a lot stronger and exposed so that she doesn't face the same difficulties I am [facing]. It is not good to be raised not to voice your opinion, not to answer back – everything is no, no. Eventually you will be afraid of going outside [interacting with men]. No it is not *'aib'*. ... NO WAY – would I raise my daughter in this way – NO WAY. This was WRONG (Lama).

Lama expressed her disappointment with her husband's short temper. During one interview, she turned off the tape recorder and proceeded to air her anger and frustration about her marriage. She was unhappy that her husband is ill tempered and fears his outbursts of anger. She wished she could reach out to her husband in a moment of crisis and tell him that she was experiencing a problem. However, through experience she learned that she was better off handling the problem on her own. Once the matter was under control, she could inform him. Lama's inexperience had several consequences. Firstly, she felt she made a mistake in her choice of male. Secondly, she was unhappy that she had to impose self-restriction and was unable to share her difficulties with her husband. She is aware that her upbringing disadvantaged her and she is determined to raise her daughter differently.

## MATE SELECTION IN RATIONAL MARRIAGES

Married and single women had expectations about the characteristics they were looking for in a compatible partner. All the women stressed the need to have a partner who: (a) shared similar religious beliefs, (b) shared similar family and educational background, and (c) was able to provide a comfortable lifestyle for them. The women tended to be critical of their suitors' personalities and idiosyncratic characteristics. The women paid close attention to how their suitor responded to their questions, his tone of voice, body language as well as his choice of words. A woman's attention to these minute details may appear unnecessary. However, given that some are expected to make a decision by their second meeting, these women are under tremendous pressure to make the right decision.<sup>197</sup> The manner in which women made up their mind about a potential life partner reveals their concealed apprehension as well as the social pressure under which they are.

From my interviews, I will sketch a common pattern women go through in selecting rationally their partner. Generally, a woman would meet her potential husband in her house when he paid her family a social visit with his mother or a female relative. The woman's mother and the potential husband's mother would move away at some point in the visit to give the young couple the chance to talk. Within the course of their discussion, the young woman would ask her suitor questions and discuss issues such as his attitudes towards women, his expectation of a wife, whether he believed that a woman has the right to work and to express herself, and whether she has freedom of mobility. The woman tends to be attentive to the details of the suitor's conversation. She tries to decipher whether he accepts her as an individual in her own right,

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<sup>197</sup> As I will show in the next paragraph there were some women who had the opportunity to have several meetings over a period of two to three months.

whether she feels they are able to relate to one another, and whether she feels they can share their life together. Women admitted that no matter how hard they tried to determine a suitor's personality, they were disadvantaged since their interaction was limited to an artificial environment and not real life situations. Reem (a single woman) succinctly articulated her difficulty in finding out the true nature of her suitor's personality

It is difficult to know the essence of a person until they are put in a difficult position. The person that I was interested in withdrew under difficult circumstances. There is more than beauty – I mean beauty is not a standard by which to evaluate people... It is important to me what the guy thinks of a woman – it is important to me to work and I don't want him to say "I don't want you to work - no!" Also – I want to know that he does not discriminate between the sexes! The last two points are questions I always ask, and my parents laugh when they hear me ask them.

Reem's parents do not comprehend her concerns about her rights as "an individual" once she is married. Her concern reflects the negative stereotype she has of the eastern man, who controls his wife and limits her freedom. Reem noted that her married friends are not happily married; they were saddled with responsibilities and obligations and were no longer free to come and go as they pleased. Many of her friends had to inform or ask their husbands' permission before doing anything. Reem pointed out that her married friends' predicament is reflective of the eastern man's attitude, who believes that his wife must obey him in every single thing.

Nawal, another single woman, said that after meeting a suitor she says a prayer to guide her since she has little information to rely on when making up her mind. She contrasts the painstaking process of reaching a decision regarding a potential husband to a business transaction a merchant undertakes, where the merchant is forced to avert a "bad deal."

So I say a prayer when I'm hesitant -- am not sure and reluctant. Marriage is taking a risk -- it is like an unopened watermelon -- you are taking a chance. I say a prayer -- and I pay attention to my senses -- and my premonition. It is like being a merchant who is taking his first step in a trade deal (Nawal).

Nadia said to her suitor, Khalid (who is now her husband) that he could not take his privileged male status for granted. Just because he liked her and wanted her as his wife did not automatically mean that his wish would materialise. Nadia challenged Khalid from the start of their relationship. Instead of conceding to his proposal and being grateful that he wanted her as his wife, she refused his request so that he would recognise her existence as an independent person. Although she was expected to be timid, she was assertive. She wanted to establish a precedent with him that he needed to take her opinion and needs into consideration. Nadia was also apprehensive. She rhetorically asked "on what basis do I judge him when I have no experience? I lack knowledge in marital relations and sexual relations because I was raised that everything is *'aib* and *haram*."

Nadia laughingly recalled her first meeting with her husband and his mother. She said that as Khalid and his mother were leaving the house, Khalid told her mother that he wanted to officially ask for Nadia's hand in marriage. Her mother was delighted and gave her approval. However, Nadia refused the proposal and informed her mother that she would not accept him. Khalid was confused and shocked by her refusal. He expected that by virtue of his eligible status as a young bachelor and a university graduate, Nadia would accept him. He called her to find out why she rejected his proposal

Because you didn't wait to hear what the person opposite you had to say [implying herself]! Perhaps you did not appeal to me! He was silent. I thought the line was disconnected. I said "Hello, hello." He was dumfounded and said "I'm sorry you are right, but I -- [unclear]." I said, "What did you see from me --

that you would want me? Perhaps – I [would] turn out to be nothing [implying a disappointment].” So he said, “Give me a chance.” I said, “You should have [thought of that] from the beginning. I mean, we should have gotten to know one another a little bit better – before you came on a very formal visit [with the intention of getting engaged]. My parents are the type [she quickly turned around and told me that she wanted to give him the impression that her parents were not strict and of a controlling nature, so that he would never take his privilege as a male for granted] that would allow you to come and visit [me at home] within limits. In addition – the house is big and there is room for us to have our space and privacy. Not from the very first visit you say ‘Yes – I want her. Am I a showpiece? I mean, I am not a beauty queen – I’m just average.’” He said, “Before you put the phone down, please hear me out. I want to tell you how you captured my attention. It was the way you served me.” [She reflected out loud] I have no idea what I served him and how I served him. [She went on and stated his comments to her] “I found you very graceful, and ladylike.” – I mean he saw things in me that I’ve taken for granted and never paid attention to. It was easier to talk on the telephone because we were not facing one another. So – we agreed to meet one more time. So we [meaning her parents] gave him another appointment and he came over. I told him that one of my conditions was that I work. He said, “I love a woman who works because she has a distinct personality and is more capable in rearing her children.”

Nadia exercised her agency within the confines of the socio-cultural framework, which dictates a woman to marry through traditional and conventional means. Within these restrictions, she was able to be playful and assert herself as a woman with rights and needs. She defied the prevailing GPD on the micro and macro level.<sup>198</sup> She gave Khalid the impression that her parents were not as traditional and conservative as he assumed them to be, since they would allow him to visit her at home. She told him that he acted hastily and was presumptuous and cautioned him not to assume that she was his prize or could treat her as a piece of merchandise. She purposefully

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<sup>198</sup> Coming from a traditional family, her parents and community expected her to accept the suitor. By disregarding the cultural norms, she essentially was defying the GPD on the micro/macro level. Naqshabandi (1995, 123) notes that Jordanian women are under considerable pressure, because they don’t have “the right to refuse or accept marriage proposals.”

delivered a blow to what she perceived to be his over inflated male ego and made him conscious that he could not own her, could not control her, or side step her.

## MARRIAGE CONTRACT IN RATIONAL AND LOVE MARRIAGES

Randa married her first cousin for love. She had the chance to get to know him because he lived with her family between semester breaks while studying at the university. Her father never objected to their interaction or outings because he had no idea that there was something going on between them. Once her cousin made his intentions known to her father, they could no longer go out until they signed the marriage contract known in Arabic as *katb al kitab*.<sup>199</sup>

Once a Muslim woman accepts a marriage proposal, she is expected to sign the marriage contract. Most of the married Muslim women I interviewed felt pressured to sign the marriage contract once they started going out with their future husband. Signing the marriage contract is a way the woman and her family save face and maintain their honour when the couple date unchaperoned.<sup>200</sup> By signing the marriage contract, they are announcing to society their outings are serious since they intend to marry. A woman who signs the marriage contract is considered to be lawfully married and thus is socially perceived as an honourable woman.

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<sup>199</sup> Literally means the signing of the book.

<sup>200</sup> The marriage contract has a dual purpose; it protect the woman if she engages in sex, and saves the family's honour, because her behaviour is considered to be lawful. For a couple to be considered properly married, they need to publicly announce their marriage to the community by having a party. Customarily, a couple usually consummate their marriage after the wedding celebration. Thus there are two pre-requisites for a Muslim marriage to be considered valid in Jordan, first, the marriage contract must be signed, and second a social gathering celebrating the couple's matrimony must follow it, either immediately after signing the contract or a few months later.

The designated time frame for a woman to sign the marriage contract varied among the participants.<sup>201</sup> Some signed it immediately after accepting their suitors' marriage proposal; others signed it on the day of their engagement<sup>202</sup> or on the day of their marriage ceremony. The majority signed it in between their engagement and wedding ceremony, while a few signed it on their wedding day. In all the cases, the woman's father determined the time when he thought his daughter needed to sign her marriage contract.<sup>203</sup> The majority of the women preferred to sign it after being sure of their decision, otherwise they risked being labelled "divorced" if they broke up with their fiancé, even if they never engaged in sex.

#### SPECIAL CLAUSE IN MARRIAGE CONTRACT

Although Islam and the Jordanian Personal Status Law allows Muslim women to stipulate conditions in their marriage contract,<sup>204</sup> the majority of the women did not take advantage of their right. Article 19 in the Jordanian Personal Status Law No. 61 for 1976 states:

If the marriage contract stipulates a condition that is beneficial to one of the two sides, and if that condition does not contravene the aims of the marriage and does not entail anything that is forbidden by religious law, and if it is recorded

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<sup>201</sup> Most of the women married their husbands two to three months after their first encounter. Some stretched the time to five months. There were a few exceptional cases where the women married after 2 years of knowing their husband, and these women were Christian. See Afshar (1999, 128-132); Al-Khayyat (1990); Singerman (1995, chapter 2) regarding cultural practices pertaining to the marriage contract.

<sup>202</sup> Some of the women would hold the formal engagement party the day the suitor formally asks their hand in marriage, others, hold the engagement party within a very short period of time. This custom holds true for both Christian and Muslim women.

<sup>203</sup> The fathers dictated the time. Women could drag the timing for a few weeks, but generally they followed through on their fathers' wishes, because they knew he could forbid them to go out with their future husband.

<sup>204</sup> The conditions should not violate the *shari'a*. Common stipulations are a woman's right to employment and/or education; right to travel and the right to divorce her husband known as *'isma*. A sample of what a marriage contract looks like is available in Antoun (1972, 126-127).



in the marriage contract, it must be observed (Al-Kutba and Konrad-Adenauer 1998, 77).

Some local feminists, journalists and prominent public figures attribute women's failure to include stipulation in their marriage contract to women's ignorance of their rights,<sup>205</sup> however, this is not what I found. While there were a couple of instances where older women did not know their rights, the majority chose not to include any conditions.

No, we never thought about it at our time. Today, women are being made aware of their legal rights and that they have a right to include certain stipulations. But from my own personal experiences after going out with him and getting to know him, these stipulations are meaningless. For women who are frustrated with their husbands, they abandon all their stipulations to leave their husbands (Kafa).

The few women who included conditions, did so because it was a family tradition.<sup>206</sup> Those who did not either felt it was either unnecessary, or they had ambivalent feelings regarding the matter. Women who did not think it was necessary knew and trusted their husband and felt safe about their marriage. They believed that their husband would be supportive of their needs and would allow them to pursue their professional career.

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<sup>205</sup> Personal interview with Nawal Fa'uri, Ellen Khouri, and Sheikh Hamdi Murad. See Jordan Times (April 20, 2001) "Updated, Modernised, Personal Status Law regarding marriage sits idle, reports Fulbright scholar", by Rana Hussein. In the report Hussein states that the Fulbright researcher who conducted studies on marriage contracts for the year 1999 concluded that many people who sign marriage contracts are not aware of their rights or obligations. It is possible that one's socio-economic level and age plays an important role in this matter.

<sup>206</sup> One woman said it was a customary practice on the maternal side of her family. The women stipulated the right to divorce their husband (*al 'isma bi idha*). The reason women chose to include this stipulation is related to the slow bureaucratic procedures in the judicial system when a woman decided to apply for divorce. Though including this right in a marriage contract did not guarantee that a woman would be granted a divorce once she filed, rather it would facilitate the process. Since the completing my fieldwork, the personal status laws in Jordan have been amended (in December 1991) and a woman has the right to file for divorce even if she does not stipulate it in her marriage contract.



No. I should have written down that I wanted to work but I didn't. I felt that it wasn't necessary because there was TRUST between us (Nadia).

Nadia felt that it was not necessary because she felt secure in her marital relationship and trusted her husband.

The ambivalent women felt it wasn't necessary for them, but said that they wanted their daughters to include stipulations in their marriage contract. The mothers said that because they were "blinded" by their love for their husband they did not feel the necessity for any conditions, but they feared that their daughters might not be as lucky as them. Therefore, these women wanted to protect their daughter's rights. These women were aware of the ease by which a man could divorce his wife or to take on a second wife without their knowledge.<sup>207</sup> Thus, these women are cognizant of their daughter's vulnerability given the unstable politico- economic conditions in the Middle East.

Hiba stated that she wanted her daughter to include the right to divorce her husband in her marriage contract

I didn't ask for anything special [include a special clause in her marriage contract]. I know my sister asked to have the *'isma bi idha* [the right to divorce her husband] and she was married

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<sup>207</sup> In Dec. 2001, the personal status law in Jordan was amended, and men lost some of their privileges. Provisional Law No. 82 for 2001 Amending the Personal Status Law 1(c) states "The court and according to the new amendment to the personal status law should inform the first wife of the husband's second marriage. Moreover, the second wife should also be informed of the husband's first marriage. 1 (e) states "Two paragraphs have been added to article 126, namely b and c. Paragraph b has given the wife and before the consummation of marriage (before the *khoulwa*) the right to request separation provided that she pays back whatever part of her dowry she had received and all marriage expenses paid by the husband. The qadi (judge) can terminate the marriage if the husband does not comply or refuses to divorce. Paragraph c states that the wife, before or after consummating the marriage, is entitled to termination of this marriage contract if she feels that she dislikes her husband and cannot go on in this marriage provided that she relinquishes all her legal and conjugal rights. If the judge fails to reconcile the two spouses then irrevocable divorce is granted within 30 days" (Correspondence with JNCW, [jncw@nets.com.jo](mailto:jncw@nets.com.jo) on 28 Feb. 2002).

seven years before me. I don't know – I didn't think of these things – when I was getting married – I was so happy – I didn't think I was going to get a divorce – I didn't think of those things. Now when I'm thinking about it – I want my daughters to have it. We talked about it, my husband and I. As far as I'm concerned – I know – God forbid – that at any time – if I don't want to be with my husband – he won't hold me captive – because – we have a very open - equal relationship because we're [in the marriage] because we want to be there. If one of us doesn't want to be there – well – no - one can force her or him [to remain]. But – I don't know whether my daughters will have such a husband? So maybe – this is one thing that I would like to have my daughters have in their wedding contract” (Hiba).

Maysoon realised how lucky she was that her husband turned out to be understanding and supportive.<sup>208</sup> Her husband could have prevented her from working since she did not stipulate this condition in her marriage contract.<sup>209</sup> She articulated the need to educate her daughter about her rights with regards to the marriage contract

I mean – she needs to understand that it is a CONTRACT. Not that she needs to write everything down – but she needs to discuss them with him – to discuss married life more in details with him before getting married. For example, he needs to understand that she has the right to travel on her own. I mean it [marriage] it is more than I just love you and want to live with you. There are so many other things involved. I'd like her to be more aware of marriage before she gets into it. For me, I was LUCKY, as I said, nothing came up – that would have made an issue between him and me that would have it difficult. For example, in my work now I have to travel a lot. We never discussed that. I mean – I could have said, “I'm going to go and work for this organization and I have to travel a lot” and he would have said “no”. What then? (Maysoon).

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<sup>208</sup> Perhaps she realized that including certain conditions is for her own good and future. A large number of women referred to themselves as “lucky”. By using this term they are indirectly acknowledging their awareness of being passive agents in an important juncture in their life. Moreover, they are hinting that by virtue of being a woman they have to abide by their family's prerogatives. Yet, as I illustrated in the case of Maysoon, this does not mean that they will abide by the wishes of their suitor and be complacent.

<sup>209</sup> If a woman is working when her husband meets her and they marry, he cannot prevent her from working after marriage, since he accepted her to be his wife as a working woman. Given the recent amendments in aspects of the Personal Status Laws, it is too early to determine whether the recent changes will benefit women when they choose not include stipulations in their marriage contract.

Others mentioned that including stipulations in the marriage contract is their right according to Islam and protects their interests, yet they felt uncomfortable because the terms and conditions signal a lack of faith in their husband. They perceived the stipulations as socially inappropriate and shameful.

It has social implications. ... Sometimes, you can ruin the relationship from the beginning. According to our culture – if you immediately tell somebody I’m going to put my conditions’ it is as if you DON’T trust them. I think it is difficult. I don’t think I can ask her [my daughter] to do something like this [to include any stipulations], though I know it is correct. ... What is in theory is different from reality [practice]. I think the law needs to be changed – so that a woman has the right to file for divorce. This is far easier to deal with than for a woman to include stipulations in her marriage contract – because it is not customary [socially acceptable]. So if a woman puts a condition in the marriage contract – it will put the man back – [put him off. He may wonder and ask you] – “Why don’t you trust me?” I don’t think it is very feasible. It is ... difficult I think ... I would like [for my daughters] to include the condition that her husband cannot take another wife. I don’t know – it is courageous to write down your terms on the marriage contract (Randa).

Randa articulates the difficulty some women face when they decide to include conditions in the marriage contract. She concludes that it is not feasible for women to include stipulations. The conditions signify a woman’s lack of trust in her husband. Given women’s concern with their reputation, it could be argued that since Randa stated that a woman who does stipulate conditions is “courageous” she is concerned with protecting her reputation and is afraid of what people might say.<sup>210</sup> Randa considers the tradition of not including special conditions more important than her actual rights in Islam. Finally, it is plausible that women who are ambivalent about including any conditions fear that by writing in conditions they decrease their chances of

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<sup>210</sup> During one of the interviews she confided in me and shared an experience highlighting the importance she places on people’s opinions of her, and her fear of tarnishing her image and reputation.

marriage. Widad said that if she had asked for the right to divorce her husband, their marriage would not have taken place

[Laughing] no, no, if I wrote that he wouldn't have accepted that (Widad).

Samar is mindful of the difference between theory and practice. She stresses the discrepancy between a woman's right to dictate her conditions and the degree to which they will be honoured. She hinted at the futility of this exercise because there were no guarantees that they would be honoured. During the interviews her contradictory beliefs regarding the special clause in the marriage contract emerged. She believes that the marriage contract is an important document, setting the stage for a man and woman's future marital life. She believes that a woman is better off finding out what characteristics she needs to look for in a potential spouse<sup>211</sup> rather than including stipulations in the marriage contract.<sup>212</sup> She concludes that knowing how to judge a person's character will be more advantageous to a woman than writing in certain conditions.

[In] the marriage contract, she [a woman] can write in her conditions. According to what I understand from my female lawyer friend, she can stipulate ANY term she wants. For example, if her husband were to take a second wife she can demand divorce. ... For example, if you write in your contract that you want to work and he prevents you, you can ask for a divorce. So the marriage contract is no different than any contract, [it is like] a sale contract and so on. But the question I ask is to what extent can one apply this concept? Who will lose? This is where the power game starts! ... Yes, I may place many terms and conditions in her [my daughter's] marriage contract but what is more important, is her choice [of] partner. What is needed, is for me to prepare and educate her from a young age what she should consider to be her right choice in her partner (Samar, third interview).

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<sup>211</sup> Being selective and careful in her choice of partner.

<sup>212</sup> Assuming that a woman is privileged to have time to know her husband.

I think our daughters, myself and other [women should pay closer attention and take this issue more seriously since] this is a contract – now, as I have gotten older, I'm realising the importance of this contract. It is the FIRST AGREEMENT and the basis and foundation for everything else. The contract ought to be between the future husband and wife and not between the husband to be and the bride's father. This is a matter that women fail to understand (Samar, first interview).

Samar alludes to the customary practice where the father is the one who stipulates the conditions in the marriage contract, although Islam urges women to be active participants in this matter.

## DOWRY

Although women diverged regarding the special clause, they tended to converge on the matter of their dowry. All the women were against having a large prompt dowry, but their views regarding their deferred dowry differed.<sup>213</sup> A few women did not object to having a large deferred dowry, since they believed it protected them against being divorced (Afshar 1999a; Naqshabandi 1995; Moors 1995). However, the majority of women did not believe in the merit of the deferred dowry.<sup>214</sup> Generally, the women considered the deferred dowry meaningless: "if you are unhappy in your marriage, then all what you want is a divorce." They knew that, given the

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<sup>213</sup> Article 44 of the Personal Status Law stipulates that a dowry must be stated in the marriage contract (Naqshabandi 1995, 182). Payment of the *mahr* is imposed by the Qur'an (Afshar 1999, 138). Prompt dowry, is the dowry paid to the bride at the time of marriage, and deferred is paid to the wife when her husband divorces her or at a later time (Roded 1999; Zulficar 1995). *Mahr* is considered a sign of respecting and honouring the women (Abdul-Rauf, 1979), since she is the future mother of the new generation. Naqshabandi (1995) notes that in her study on Jordanian women, 59.7% of the women did not believe that a prompt dowry was necessary a small percentage believed that a dowry is necessary since Islam mandates it. As for the deferred dowry 51.6% were not in favour of it, and 48% supported it. According to my research, the *mahr* has taken on a monetary value: assumed a financial character.

<sup>214</sup> This is contradictory to the findings of Moors (1995) on women in Nablus, who felt that the prompt dower should be symbolic and the deferred dowry should be a large sum to deter their husbands from divorcing them. They are in favour of stipulating a token amount of JD 1 because they are aware of the difficult financial situation their fiancé was in.

difficulty in obtaining a divorce, a woman would have to forgo her deferred dowry, and also have to provide her husband with a monetary incentive.<sup>215</sup>

I don't believe in deferred dowry. A family member of mine got married and her deferred dower was 15,000JD. Her husband was abusive and she declined her dowry, as well as *nafaqa* (alimony) and she ended up paying him money just to get a divorce. I think it is meaningless and is just symbolic. It is irrelevant (Farah).

In general, the participants have a negative attitude towards dowry because it no longer reflects their personal worth and symbolic value. Instead, it reflects their monetary value and turns the marriage transaction into a sales transaction. Therefore, it is not surprising that the women I interviewed oppose the idea of high dowries, since they perceive themselves as individuals with dignity and not a commodity for sale. Hind boasted that even her father was against the idea of a large dowry and asked her husband to pay two dinars, a token figure, one dinar for her prompt and the other for her deferred dowry.<sup>216</sup>

Because my dad said he didn't want anything. My father is against all of these customs. He considers it an insult. His daughter is not for sale – though we come from Nablus and the dower reflects the value of the bride (Hind).

Hind's father only put a symbolic value for his daughter's *mahr* because in his mind his daughter was not for sale.

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<sup>215</sup> In the recent amendment to the Personal Status law, a woman has the right to ask for divorce as long as she forgoes her deferred dower, "provided that she pays back whatever part of her dowry she had received and all marriage expenses paid by the husband" (e-mail correspondence with JNCW, February 28, 2002). Prior to the amendment, if women did not stipulate in their marriage contract their right to divorce, they would pay their husbands large sums of money as a monetary incentive for a divorce. Or what Hijab (1988) refers to as women buying their freedom.

<sup>216</sup> According to Islam and Jordanian Personal Status Law, a woman must stipulate the monetary value of her dowry, even if it is a token amount.

Due to space limitations, I have chosen to write about one couple that married for love. Yara, a Christian woman married her Muslim husband for love. Interfaith marriage in Jordan is not common. A major reason relates to the fact that the state only allows religious marriages to take place.<sup>217</sup> This means that if a couple with different religious backgrounds want to marry in Jordan, one partner needs to convert,<sup>218</sup> or the couple need to travel to a western country to have a civil marriage. Yara was able to convince her parents to let her marry her chosen husband by capitalizing on her age. As a 39-year-old woman no one in her family expected her to marry. Yet, when she decided to marry her husband, her parents strongly objected. She told them that if she did not marry this man she was not going to marry at all. So her parents, desperate to marry her off, since it is the most honourable thing a parent can do, agreed.

## SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SEXUAL PRACTICE

Women were not forthcoming about the intimate nature of their sexual life, since it involved their “sexual honour” (Stewart 1994). Married women openly talked about how they met their husband,<sup>219</sup> but, when it came to matters regarding their sex lives they were very reserved.<sup>220</sup> This is common in the Middle East region (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993; Friedel 1994). Silence implies that a woman expressing her sexual desire, sexual knowledge or even having a

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<sup>217</sup> Civil marriages are not conducted in Jordan. However, they are recognized if a couple has a civil marriage in the West. Generally, if an interfaith marriage is to take place one partner may have to convert. For example, if a Muslim man marries a Christian woman, she does not necessarily have to convert to Islam. (Legally, children follow their father’s religion and take their father’s name). However, if she does not, then legally as a non-Muslim she cannot inherit anything from her husband upon his death. If a Christian man marries a Muslim woman he has to convert to Islam, because a Muslim woman must marry a Muslim man.

<sup>218</sup> Commonly it is the Christian who has to convert, since any Muslim who converts is considered an apostate.

<sup>219</sup> While most single women indirectly talked about having a boyfriend they would only talk about their boyfriend in the privacy of my study room, for fear someone would over hear them.

<sup>220</sup> My experiences were consistent with Accad’s (1991, 241) who notes that sexuality is of the utmost concern for the women she interviewed, yet women were reluctant to discuss their sexual lives for fear of gossip and accusations of immorality, and thus imposed “autocensorship.”



sexual identity is taboo<sup>221</sup> (Al-Khayyat 1990; Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998). As noted before, Mernissi (1987a; 1991) and Sabbah (1984) illustrate that a woman's sexuality in the Arab Muslim world is actually feared. According to my understanding from the Islamist women I interviewed, Islam urges women and men to marry (Afshar 1999; Moghissi 1999), and satisfy their sexual urges within the confines of the institution of marriage.

Ruba: The Qur'an encourages a loving relationship – sex is an expression of an emotion rather than an instinctual act. Therefore, the implication is that the husband should avoid anything that harms the wife.<sup>222</sup>

Leah: Where in the Qur'an is this written?

Ruba: It is a *hadith*. The act of sex is not about fulfilling one's instinct – it is an expression of an emotion – an expression of affection.

The state views marriage for the sole purpose of “starting a family and procreation”<sup>223</sup> (Al-Kutba and Konrad-Adenauer 1998, 76). Most of the women focused on the importance of abstaining from premarital sex since Islam and Christianity consider premarital sex a sin. For them, sexual abstinence symbolised their respect for their own bodies. They stressed the importance of a woman's virginity. As Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. (1998, 134) argue “women locate themselves within a discourse of virginity, defining the female body as something of value the young woman can give to her [future husband].” There were some who had engaged in partial penetration.<sup>224</sup> This form of foreplay was not considered to be an act of sex, since their hymen

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<sup>221</sup> For single women, talking about sex could be misconstrued as having engaged in sex (Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998).

<sup>222</sup> Ruba Farkh is an Islamist feminist as well as a journalist.

<sup>223</sup> According to Article 2 in the Jordanian Personal Status Law, No. 61 for 1976.

<sup>224</sup> Accad (1991) notes the silence revolving around the topic of women's sexuality, is causing women to feel isolated and misunderstood. In her study on gender relations in Morocco, Davies (1993) notes that young women engaged in premarital sex as far back as 40 years ago. According to BBC news online dated June 26, 2000, entitled *Battle of the sexualities*, by Nick Pelham, a first pan-Arab conference on sex in the



was still intact. Preserving their hymen symbolised their respect for their own bodies. Since they only considered complete penetration to be an act of sex, then any other act was dismissed as not sex.

## SEX AND CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

For single women who indirectly mentioned that they engaged in premarital sex, their silence reflects their detached attitude towards this time-honoured custom. Aside from disregarding the mythical honour of virginity, they are aware of their need to protect their honourable status since society is obsessed with the notion of honour and women's hymenization. This leads one to question why Arab-Jordanian women are complicit partners in the double sexual standards? Mernissi (1982, 187) explains

The explanation lies in the ideological roots of the traditional Muslim family, which condemns women alone to monogamy and the control of sexual instinct. Men, by contrast, accept no such limitations: they have as many partners as they choose. As well as four legal wives, each man has the right to as many concubines as his purchasing power permits. Moreover, repudiation permits him to change his legal sexual partners as many times as he wishes.

The cultural taboos surrounding sex has mystified it. Approximately two-thirds of the married women interviewed had been ignorant about sexual matters. They were apprehensive about their wedding night because of their sexual inexperience.

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Middle East took place at St. Anthony's College, Oxford. Forty sexologists from the Arab world met and discussed the actual sexual practices in the Arab world. Researchers claimed 50% of Lebanese women lost their virginity before marriage. Another survey on Lebanese women indicated that single women had better sex lives than married women.

The majority were women with rational marriages.<sup>225</sup> As one woman said,

You are physically involved with a man whom you don't love.  
You are fearful. In the West – the women are in love with their  
mates and perhaps it is for this reason why they don't talk of the  
fear or experience the fear we experience.

Two older single women were virgins and wanted to have sex. They felt awkward when they compared themselves with western women who were well experienced in these matters. One of them felt ambivalent regarding her virginity after feeling disappointed by the men she considered might be eligible husbands

I can add the dilemma that I have at the moment – because the way we are conditioned in our Arab culture which I got – got from my mother, possibly my father, but I think mainly my mother – relationships with men – as I was growing up in the past ten years, most particularly when I was between the ages of 18 and 28, have to be very puritanical, platonic, even if they were considered boyfriends. Now – sex before marriage was very much out of the question, [you have to] save yourself for the right Arab boy! That was seen as a mark of a good girl, well-bred, good family, good girl, okay? Now – as my mind started opening up and [I started to re-evaluate and to] discard all these values that I inherited, I was left with a conviction that this [notion of saving myself] just – has to be thrown out the window. This is no [longer] the mark of a good girl - [I am] totally convinced of that ... But if I were to meet somebody tomorrow – if he were Arab number one, I would not want to give him the satisfaction of being number one – the first man. Number two, if I were to meet a westerner – I am somewhat ashamed for him to know that I am ... that he is my first. THAT is my dilemma, at the moment. ... I DON'T think Arab guys DESERVE the sacrifice ... Yes. [Pause] I've missed out on a whole dimension. And I'm not as comfortable with my womanhood as I would be if I had [engaged in sex] (Nadwa).

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<sup>225</sup> This was not the case for women who married for love. There were some who were well informed in this matter and some who were ignorant. I was unable to discern a pattern that distinguished between the latter two groups.

Nadwa, a single woman in her early to mid 30s, is disturbed about her virginity. She doesn't believe that the Arab man deserves her virginity since he can engage in premarital sex. Because of the sexual double standards she is missing out on experiencing sex. In her mind the sacrifice is not warranted. She feels unsettled about having to admit to a western man that she is still a virgin. She contemplated having her hymen surgically removed. Nadwa questions the merit of virginity, and the socio-cultural injunction of making virginity her definitive identity (Holland, Ramazanoglu et al. 1996). Although the cultural taboo on sex denies her the right to be sexual, she yearns to fully experience her sexuality. Weeks and Holland (1996, 3) state sexuality "is linked to all aspects of social life and implicated in the construction of individual identity." It is "as much about self-making and self invention as it is about dominant forms of regulation" (p. 6). Nadwa is ambivalent about giving her future spouse the privilege and satisfaction of knowing he is the first man in my life. Nadwa is an exception given that Arab-Jordanian women are brought up to save themselves for their husbands.

Tala, a 37-year-old single virgin, was mortified at the possibility that she might not bleed on her wedding night. To her, as well as many others in her society, bleeding is synonymous with virginity. Her virginity is extremely important to her; it defines her sense of self. Even though her husband was previously married and has been living in Europe for the past 20 years, she fears that if she does not bleed her husband would perceive her as promiscuous and dishonourable. She recognises that her husband must have had affairs as a single man in Europe, however, that did not matter. What mattered was how her husband would think of her and how he would perceive her if she did not bleed.

Tala: "[laughing nervously]. He may think it is something else [I am not a virgin]. Even if there is trust – I don't know? [She is afraid that he won't believe her].

Leah: Let's say - hypothetically you turn out to be a woman who has an elastic hymen and you don't bleed. How would you handle the situation?

Tala: I'll tell him "OK, you are a [health professional], and you know there are various types [of hymen] and I am one of those exceptional cases." I would expect that he would understand. I don't think that he would suspect that I have slept with someone else. I don't think so – but it will always remain in the back of his mind – 'I wonder what she did?' Perhaps - he will always have an Arab mentality.

The fact that he may suspect her means that she will never be honourable in his eyes. To put it differently, fear of being (or even perceived/suspected as) dishonourable permeates the lives of most of the single women. There is a deep-seated fear and panic about needing to be a virgin (Davis 1993; El Saadawi 1980; Wikan 1991).

Wisam said that her husband, Munir, was not her first love, yet, she withheld that information from him. She told Munir because she trained and rode horses she would not bleed on their first night. She justified the lying on the grounds of the cultural double standards of sexuality.

I said, "You know I used to ride a lot of horses and I used to even train horses. So what if I'm not a – virgin?" and he said, "That's okay." But then he says he always wonders if it's the horse or somebody else. (Laughs) ... *ya'ni* it's still on his mind. Seriously I intended to leave him if he said he did mind because he wasn't a saint [while living and studying] in [Europe] (Wisam).

Wisam could have followed the women's tradition of stitching their hymen when they engaged in premarital sex,<sup>226</sup> but she chose not to. She pretended to be a virgin, though her husband was

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<sup>226</sup> Based on a personal interview with a local GP and a professor of Medicine at the University of Jordan there are two procedures for hymen repair. One is a very simple procedure that entails suturing the two sides of the fragmented hymen with one stitch, the night before the wedding. Upon intercourse the suture ruptures causing some minor bleeding. The second procedure is more complex and requires general anaesthesia, though it can be done under local anaesthesia. Before explaining the procedure it is necessary to explain the anatomy of the hymen. The hymen is a thin membranous tissue that covers the entrance of

not really convinced. Wisam did not feel that her husband could accept the reality of her “non-virginity” because of the cultural and religious emphasis of a woman’s virginity prior to marriage, so she sought to protect her husband from the truth and preserve appearances (Mernissi 1982). As Mernissi argues, when women are between two opposing forces, satisfying their personal needs and conforming to the dictates of their social group, it is highly probable that they will resort to “trickery, which is the corollary of inequality” (p. 188). By not making an issue out of her virginity, both Wisam and Munir are complicit partners in both the reproduction of the prevailing double standard of sexuality as well as their own deception.

Mernissi (1982, 185) argues that artificial virginity exists because

Men ask the impossible: they want access to women for brief sexual encounters before marriage, but once they have decided to marry, they launch into a frantic search for a virgin whom no other man has 'defiled'. Such a man stands a good chance of penetrating crass stitches put in by clever gynaecologists, and this is in fact a just turn of events because he too has “defiled” the daughters, sisters and cousins of other men, and thereby, by his own moral code, the men themselves. In the mind of the man who seeks to marry a virgin after taking the virginity of other young women before marriage, sex is defilement, sexual contact is degrading experience which degrade the woman, and by the same token, any men who are linked to her by ties of blood or marriage. And he, the hero, destroys the honour of all these men by means of their young women, and will, on his wedding day, win the greatest victory of all by marrying that rare jewel, a woman whom no man has ever touched.”

Suzie is angry about the sexual double standards and a man’s and his family’s unrealistic expectation of his wife: firstly, that she is a virgin and sexually innocent, and secondly, once in bed she miraculously acquires a mastery of the art of sexual performance. She wonders how

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the vagina. It has a natural opening allowing the menstrual flow to exit during menstruation. When a virgin has intercourse, the hymen tears with parts of it remaining attached to wall of the neck of the vagina. The surgical procedure entails making the vaginal opening tighter and sewing together the torn sides of the hymen restoring its natural vaginal state.

women who are brought up to be ignorant about sex before marriage can turn into experts in pleasing their husband sexually in bed. She is critical of her upbringing because she was raised to believe that sex was *'aib*. She is expected to switch attitudes towards sex immediately after marriage, to desire it and feel comfortable with it. Suzie exclaims that being brought up to believe that sex is shameful interferes in her intimacy with her husband

This really is VERY, very frustrating because with no experience at all – suddenly – to be expected to know how to behave – is very tough and to know how to please men and do this and that – that was really tough! Or – at least not feel shy about what you are doing because you have been raised all this time with *'aib* and *'aib*. Then suddenly you have this switch – overnight everything is valid and you have to become a real professional [laughing] ... you CANNOT just overnight switch. I mean you're brought up to wear pyjamas – long sleeves and this and that – and suddenly – [laughing nervously] it's a total switch in character. It's really not easy. To them – it's not a switch – it's no change – because they're not the ones who make the effort to be attractive – to be ready but you're expected to dress in a certain way – to look like this and that (Suzie).

Tala's experience is a glaring example of the sexual double standards. Tala said that her husband accused her of being frigid on their honeymoon because she was too afraid to relax and enjoy sex. Tala had recounted how terrified she was of the first night. She believed that her hymen had hardened over the years and that her husband would have difficulty deflowering her. She was also influenced by the stories she heard of how painful it is the first time and mentioned that one of her friends bled profusely after her marriage was consummated. She told me that she discussed the matter with her future husband on the phone

I don't know how it came up? And he sensed that I was afraid. So he said 'no, the thing [intercourse] is not scary – and I will prolong the process so that you won't feel it [pain]. I will do it western style and not eastern style'. So I thought to myself what is this western and eastern way? Why – is there a difference?

He wanted to prolong the process [foreplay] so that I won't feel pain. I said to myself at that point – 'no do it quickly so that I won't feel pain!' [laughing]. So you know – I am not married [implying she is a virgin] so I am not experienced. I've only read books. So what do you think he means by western and eastern? (Tala).

By western style he meant that he would engage in foreplay, take his time before he actually penetrated her. He would take into consideration her fears and anxiety. He would make sure that she was ready physiologically before consummating the marriage.

Through my fieldwork, I have discerned that the majority of women who had rational marriages and some who married for love arrived at their first sexual encounter with their husband without sexual knowledge except what they had learned from their conversation with him. Learning about sex through their husbands implies that men are "our holders and creators of sexual knowledge" (Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. 1998, 59). Mothers were complicit in perpetuating the notion that sexual knowledge is the domain of men, and the mother's silence regarding sexual matters reinforced its taboo nature. A few Islamist feminists believe that it is the mother's responsibility to teach her daughter about "the facts of life". However, as noted, this does not happen. Tala and a few other women were frightened of their wedding night because they were not sure what to expect even though their husband did explain to them "the facts of life" during their brief courtship.<sup>227</sup>

Lama, who chose her partner on a rational basis, asked her girlfriends to come over and stay with her on her wedding night. Her husband laughed when he overheard her. She said that her

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<sup>227</sup> Ignorance of sexual matters is a social problem prompting health professional to hold seminars particularly in poor areas. For example, in an article in the Jordan Times, entitled "Newlyweds should take things easy, psychiatrist says" dated June 25, 2001, a local psychiatrist Habashneh is quoted as saying to an audience that "both the bride and groom should take time to get to know each other if they haven't known each other beforehand, and they should be given complete privacy." The emphasis should not be on the groom to "accomplish his mission" of deflowering his bride, rather the wedding night should be a joyous occasion and not a stressful and anxious one.



husband left her alone that first night. Mayyada, who married for love, said that she was petrified of her wedding night and told her husband on that night she was feeling ill. She felt relieved that he did not sleep with her. However, she was aware that she needed to allow her husband to consummate the marriage. She ended up with a bladder infection after consummating the marriage and was relieved because it gave her a reprieve and allowed her soreness to heal.

I hear my friends talk about the fact that married couples had to wash themselves often, but never understood why? I didn't even know that men ejaculated. This is how ignorant I was<sup>228</sup> (Lama).

Randa, who married for love, did not know what to expect on her wedding night. She was surprised when she felt pain upon penetration. That experience left her fearful of sex, and for a brief period she associated pain with sex and was reluctant to engage in sex. Her husband had to coax her into it. She went on to say that her body adjusted to the changes, she healed and learned to enjoy sex.

All the women except one said that their mothers did not prepare them for their sexual life. A few mothers discussed the "facts of life" with daughters when they started menstruating. None of the mothers talked to their daughters about what to expect on their wedding night. Mary, a 40-year-old woman who married for love, said that her mother told her a few days before she got married

You really have to trust your husband that night [wedding night] that he won't do something damaging (Mary).

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<sup>228</sup> A local study by psychiatrist Walid Sarhan for the Second Mediterranean Congress of Sexual Dysfunction revealed misconceptions regarding sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour among married Jordanian women. "Female sexual non-satisfaction is greatly affected by male sexual knowledge ... and in most cases it has a negative effect." In another paper Sarhan concluded that sexual education is lacking in the Arab world and is hardly mentioned in school curricula, "teachers usually skip the subject because they find it embarrassing and fear they might have problems in their classrooms" Jordan Times - June 28-29, 2002.



It is no wonder that a large number were fearful of their first sexual encounter, and that the majority of women skirted around the issue of sex during our discussions, referring to sex as “it”, as if sex is sinister. Veiled women were the most reluctant to divulge any information about their sexual life. The sensitive nature of the topic, and the fact that I am Christian contributed to their reluctance. Friedel (1994) noted that the manner in which interviewees perceived her and the way she perceived them led to an interactional pattern whereby both handled sexual topics with reserve. Farah, a veiled woman, hinted that her first night was a pleasurable experience

It was a nice experience. My husband's type – he is very gentle and he was very considerate. Now we know that the eastern man feels as you said [having sex with his wife] is his right. I know that with me if I said to my husband “Today I have a headache”, or “Today I'm tired” it wasn't a problem. But I know some people, when he wants it [sex] that means he wants it. It was very comfortable [implying that her first night was relaxing and pleasurable] but I know that for some of my friends it was not (Farah).

Only two women talked about their need for sexual pleasure.<sup>229</sup> Widad stated that it is her right to be sexually satisfied. It took her long time before she was able to talk about this with her husband, who initially felt uncomfortable since he considered it shameful to talk openly about it.<sup>230</sup> Perhaps he considered his wife's request to be out of accord with his notions of honourable womanhood, and was of the opinion that an honourable wife should not talk about her sexual needs

Over time I was able to convey to my husband what I like and what I need ... He would be surprised [that I asked]. He

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<sup>229</sup> Because most of the women were tight lipped about their sexual life, it is impossible to determine whether women enjoyed their sex lives or not. Their silence around sex implies that the idea of a woman being sexually active as well as having a sexual identity is a taboo.

<sup>230</sup> His western education and exposure to western culture did not override his cultural socialisation.

considered it *'aib* for me to ask, or [to tell him] this satisfies me. In the beginning I was very embarrassed to ask or say anything. Then over the years, I started to feel, within myself, that this is my right, MY RIGHT just as I met your [his] needs, you [he] need to also meet my needs. I started to discuss this matter with him and he considered it a big *'aib* to even discuss it. So I'd say no, it is not *'aib*. I need to demand my rights and talk about them. Gradually I was able to convey to him my needs. Many people can't do this. My husband is understanding. He believes that in order for you to be able to give, you must receive, a very important concept. Just as I give him, he gives me. I think this is very important in one's life (Widad).

Holland, Ramsanoglu et al. (1998) point out that women with a strong sense of self are able to talk to their husbands about their sexual needs. These women are not dependent on finding their feminine identity through their relationship with their husband. So, not only was Widad able to inform her husband of her desire for sexual fulfilment, but she also stressed its importance and that her sexual fulfilment is an integral aspect of her, as an honourable women. Widad was asserting her sexual agency. To her sex is not something done to women, rather it is an act that women participate in.

Amal, who is western educated and in her mid 40s, said that she recently discovered that she could experience sexual pleasure in her relationship with her husband

It was by mistake that I discovered masturbation [as a child]. I was taking a shower and running my hand over my body while washing myself when I discovered a tingling and wonderful sensation down there. It was after that I started to experiment with masturbation. It didn't occur to me that masturbation had anything to do with my sexuality. I learned how to give myself pleasure. Unfortunately it was not until recently that I connected the pleasure I receive from masturbation with my own sexuality and my sexual relationship with my husband (Amal).

Roded (1999) and Abdul-Rauf (1979) stress that Islam calls for men to be patient with their wives in sexual matters and to help them climax. Men are encouraged to be in tune with their

wife's needs. Both single and married women were uncomfortable talking about sex, yet I was able to deduce the existence of a range of sexual experiences among the women, from being inexperienced and ignorant about sex to being fully knowledgeable on this subject matter. From the women's accounts, a large number of women were ignorant about their bodies and sexuality. Most of the women told me that their husbands consummated the marriage on their second night, and that their husbands were very gentle and caring. Only one woman, Amal, said that her husband was impatient with her on their wedding night. This couple had engaged in premarital sex, mainly partial penetration

On my wedding night, I felt that I was being raped. He couldn't wait. I was looking forward to washing my hair, getting all the hair spray out, unwinding, drinking some Champagne - but he couldn't wait. He took all the hairpins off of my hair, and almost ripped my clothes off. He threw me on bed. There was no fondling. I was tense. To him now, he could have sex. There was NO taboo. He penetrated me fully. I was disappointed and I was sore. I was in pain. If I hadn't known him and if I hadn't had prior sexual experiences with him, I would have thought that I was being raped. He wanted sex THAT night. It was HIS right. I wanted to be romantic; I wanted to be able to wear the sexy nightgown I had bought for this special occasion. All that he wanted was me – sex - he didn't want me to wear a nightgown. On our honeymoon, we had sex all the time. I was sore (Amal).

Al-Khayyat (1990) argues that many brides in Iraq experienced being raped on their wedding night. Not socialized to meet her needs, Amal's husband's behaviour reflects the sexual frustration he feels due to the prevailing social/cultural taboos on sex. Younger women were more knowledgeable about sexual matters than the older women. It is probable that women who were strong in English had a better understanding of sexual matters because they were able to

comprehend the literature on sex, which is predominantly in English. In addition, the older generation is not comfortable using the Internet.<sup>231</sup>

Based on my fieldwork, I would say that sexual practices among some of the middle-upper class professional women in Amman are changing. There is a slight shift in women's attitudes towards sex, from fear and anxiety about sex to a daring behaviour.<sup>232</sup> Some single women said that they would engage in sex if the right partner and conditions existed. Others said they would abstain from sex until marriage because of their religious convictions.

Manal succinctly summarizes the concerns of liberal Jordanian women. I will quote her at length

I've come a long way when you take into consideration that I've come from a background where talking about sex is a taboo. This is part of our culture. As women we are not exposed to sex until we are in our 20s compared with women in the States who engage in sexual activity by the time they are 14. So when they are in their 20s they are experienced and comfortable with sex – where as we are just getting introduced to the idea. I think starting sexual activity at 14 is too young – but also waiting till your 20 is also not good. It is not fair to us women when men have many sexual experiences before they marry. It also is sad that most men prefer to marry young women who are 18 because they are inexperienced. These girls are not aware that their husbands have been fooling around and doing everything and it is exactly because of their own behaviour that they chose to marry a naïve – sexually ignorant woman. These men see all women as a means to have fun with. They don't care about their feelings. I wish my daughter will have a more open sexual experience when she gets married – I don't want her to go through my experience of being ignorant and afraid and not knowing how to deal with sex. The younger generation of today – today's 18-year-olds are far more experienced than any of us. I

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<sup>231</sup> The Arab Human Development Report 2002 note that given that most of the information on the Web is in English, a small percentage of the Arabs can benefit, only those with a good understanding of English. Moreover, a small segment of the Arab society has access to computers, approximately 0.6%.

<sup>232</sup> None of the women I interviewed mention that they resorted to have their hymen re-stitched. Though this does not mean that some women did not resort to this practice.

have seen them kissing publicly on the dance floor when I go out with my husband and friends (Manal).

Having talked about rational and love marriages, I now move on and examine how professional married women deal with their triple burden, and their complaint “I have no control over my time.”

## TRIPLE BURDEN

It is hard – you have no time for yourself. I don’t have a shower alone with my bathroom door closed since I had my son. No privacy. I no longer know what that is like? [Pause] The daily events you go through – sometimes you want to scream – I just want to have the chance to say ‘I am having a bad day.’ If I say this to my mom – she’ll just say ‘we all went through it – you are not the only one. This just shuts you up. It is as if I don’t have a right to have a bad day. (Fida)

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, women are responsible for tasks other than caring for their immediate family, husband and children. The additional responsibilities that I will review are part of women’s triple burden.<sup>233</sup> I will highlight the most common activities women engage in: caring for their own parents and/or in-laws; keeping up with their social responsibilities, following up on “minor details” such as home repairs, filing legal forms to hire domestic help and finally assisting their children with their homework. To ease their triple burden, the women have devised creative strategies. For example, it is common for family and friends to drop by for a visit in the late afternoon and evening. Married women with children find it very disruptive because they are unable to help their children with their schoolwork. For them, these social calls are stressful because they have many things they need to attend to, including the expectation of

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<sup>233</sup> Paid employment, household responsibilities, and social responsibilities including maintaining the strong bonds with their conjugal and natal family.

their being a perfect hostess.<sup>234</sup> Widad tried to find a tactful way of telling her friends and her in-laws to call first before coming over. She knew that if she were direct, they would misunderstand her and consider her remark insulting and offensive:

There are times when people drop by for an impromptu visit, which is difficult especially when [my children] have exams. I do try for example to let them know, especially my in-laws, in a very pleasant way "I wish you would call before-hand so that I can be ready to greet you properly and spend time with you, as you deserve." So over time they started to realize that I am a working woman and am busy. There are still times when people trespass but not as much (Widad).

Kafa used a similar technique to Widad. When she initially asked her friends to call before they dropped by, they complained and talked about her. In Kafa's case, not having a phone helped, because people eventually realised that if they did not alert her, there was a chance that they would not find her at home.

I think it goes back to the fact that when I got married I was working, which helped. In addition, I didn't have a telephone. So many times our families and friends would come over and not find us home, so they felt they made the trip in vain. So we told them to call us at work beforehand to let us know that they would like to come over, which I think helped to establish a pattern. It is possible that between themselves they commented about the fact that we asked them to let us know of their plans beforehand (Kafa).

Sahar has one day off a week. She and her husband look forward to a relaxing day off since they work long hours, six days a week in their own private business. Yet, they rarely end up having time for themselves because friends and relatives drop by at the last minute and invite themselves for a barbecue. Sahar is expected to show her guests respect by insisting they stay for lunch

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<sup>234</sup> Providing their guests with a cold beverage, followed by fruits and sweets and coffee.

Our house is kinda-of open door for everyone. Like in the Arab world, people will just SHOW UP. So we say welcome in and have a barbecue. We literally have 10-15 people show up every Friday [says it in an irritated tone of voice] with their children. Usually it is not planned. ... They'll usually call around 11 am in the morning [of the same day – asking us] “what are you doing for lunch? How about a barbecue?” ... By the end of the day, you've got a headache and you're exhausted (Sahar).

However, Sahar notes that these visits also occur throughout the week, which she finds difficult. After a long hard day of work, she wants to relax, watch TV with her husband and go to sleep early

Even at night you'll be sitting down watching TV – you're tired and the door bell rings “Hi!” It's given. You have to get up – get them drinks, feed them. So whatever I've got – you'll feed them ... you cannot tell people “Sorry, don't come by.” You can't, It's offensive (Sahar).

Fatima speaks for the majority of married women who are aware of their social obligation to frequently call on their husband's family, even if it means that they have less time with their natal family. It is important to them to maintain a cordial relationship with their in-laws

My family, well, maybe [I visit them] every one to two weeks. There is no fixed schedule, because they can empathize with the demands of my life style. A telephone here and there may suffice. My family, they are closer to me, so there is no reproach [blame]. But with my mother-in-law, she will reproach me if I didn't visit her often enough. But your relationship with your own [natal] family is more relaxed (Fatima).

While interviewing Sana', I noticed that she had two silver trays with beautifully decorated pieces of chocolate on it. She offered me a piece and told me of the *mubarakeh*<sup>235</sup> she was hosting to a large group of women the following day. I had never heard of this term before, so I asked her what she meant.

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<sup>235</sup> A congratulations party she was holding celebrating the birth of her newborn baby.



Because everybody wants to come [by everyday] and say *mabruk* (congratulations) - for the baby. I can't receive people everyday because I'm working. So, I am going to gather them all together and do one big thing, a ladies' tea. I'll do one or two and that's it. Some people enjoy having one or two people come by every day. I can't! I enjoy you and my friends who come over, and I can breast feed while talking. But with others it is more formal and it is cumbersome (Sana').

Social custom that dictates that family, friends, work colleagues and acquaintances must follow through on their honourable duty and call on her after giving birth (Altorki 1977; Meneley 1996). To pre-empt the constant flow of visitors, she came up with an ingenious plan, a big tea party, where people are informed to come at a particular time to fulfil their social obligations. She respected people's duty to call on her. However, she dictated the terms of the visit.

Not all women's triple burdens deal with a happy occasion. The following example shows a woman's additional burden living in a developing country, where laws and regulations are not strictly followed, nor enforced and access to redress one's grievances is not readily available as in countries that are technologically more advanced. Nadia moved into a new flat that she and her husband had just bought. A month later, Nadia found that the drainpipe in the kitchen was linked to the main sewage pipe of the city. Apparently the contractor cheated when building the apartment complex and tiled the kitchen floor without laying down the proper drainpipe.

This means we have to tear out the stone tiles on the [kitchen] floor which cost JD 8/meter.<sup>236</sup> Of course we will have to pay for it, because the contractor is broke (Nadia).

Nadia found out that the contractor was facing several lawsuits for other work he cheated on. In order to press legal charges against the contractor, she had to pay the court JD 2,000 filing fees, money she did not have at the time

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<sup>236</sup> Approximately £8/meter.



We don't have this money. All our savings have been ploughed into the house. I can't even afford to buy an accordion door, which costs JD 100 to install it between the family room and the formal living room

To make matters worse, the contractor sold the carport for their apartment to another tenant in the building. The apartment and the carport are sold separately, each requiring a separate purchase contract. This detail was not clearly noted in the sale contract, and the contractor deliberately did not inform them. Her husband had obtained a building permit to convert the carport to a convenience shop, and they had even bought the bricks for the renovation. Perhaps if they had the right *wasta* they would have been able to pursue their legal case without incurring a large debt. To add a little more spice to her story, she said that last week her husband's cousin and his family phoned them at 9 pm to inform them that they were coming for a visit, congratulating them on their new house. They got dressed up for the occasion and were on their way

I quickly had to tidy up the house. We are still living out of boxes. We are not fully unpacked.

When the relatives arrived they exclaimed, "You're still living out of boxes!" implying that she is lazy and not good housekeeper.<sup>237</sup> Her husband's relative totally discounted that Nadia is a professional career woman and not a fulltime homemaker. An honourable wife and mother would see to it that her house would first be in order before going out to work (Sha'aban 1996). Little did they know that Nadia spent every night from 10 pm until 1 am in the morning unpacking her boxes. As a working woman with no maid, Nadia needed to help her daughters

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<sup>237</sup> As Vom Bruk (1997, 204) notes in her article on Yemini elite women, "women are subjected to the moral scrutiny of other women who partly act on behalf of other men."

with their homework,<sup>238</sup> cook lunch for the following day and prepare that day's dinner. In addition, her mother was out of the country visiting her other daughter, and her father was hospitalised with diabetes. As the only adult child living in Jordan, Nadia had to also care for her father. She managed to take two weeks off work when she moved however it wasn't enough. She had lost so much weight that her clothes were hanging on her.

Upon finishing a tour of the house, the female members remarked "why do you need such a big house for all of you?" The relatives considered it their right to interfere in her family's affair and to make critical remarks. Nadia was upset as she was relating this story to me. She said, "I guess they expect my four daughters to sleep in one room!" She felt that the women were jealous of her spacious house and commented on the size of the home.<sup>239</sup> It is common in some families for relatives to interfere in their family members' lives. It is part of the dynamics of having an extended family (Al-Khayyat 1990; Altorki 1986; Barakat 1985a). In her attempt to protect her honourable status, Nadia felt it was best not to challenge her husband's relatives. Her honour rests on her cumulative deeds. Her behaviour reflects her husband's honourable status and that of her own natal family (Altorki 1986; Vom Bruck 1997). The majority of professional married women I interviewed said that they keep their relationship with their in-laws on a formal basis to avoid placing themselves in a precarious situation.

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<sup>238</sup> A common saying that Jordanian women utter, which Altorki (1986, 152) also notes is "seek knowledge, even unto China", meaning that education is very important to them. All the married professional women with children whom I interviewed spend several hours each day helping their children with homework. It is not uncommon for mothers to decline social invitations and curtail their social activities so as to make sure they are available to help out their children and provide them with the moral support they need.

<sup>239</sup> Vom Bruck (1997) notes that a Yemeni woman's attire symbolises how much her husband and her relatives value her. Yemeni women pay close attention to what other women wear; they even ask where a woman bought it/had it tailored and how much it cost. The same applies in Jordan; however, it extends beyond clothes and includes a woman's furnishings, house and car.

## WORK LIFE

According to ('Alaiwat 2001, 32) married women constitute over half of the female Jordanian labour force.<sup>240</sup> El Kharouf (2000) and Sabbagh's (1997) study on Jordanian working women note that a husband's positive attitude towards his wife's employment facilitates her participation in the labour force. Unfortunately, like single women, married women faced socio-cultural barriers regarding their working status,<sup>241</sup> especially when they assumed managerial posts. The UNDP report (2002) remarks that women's progress in the labour market depends on attitudinal changes in society. According to Flynn and Oldham's (1999) study, Jordanian women continue to face criticism by the community regarding their decision to remain in the work force.<sup>242</sup> At work, they deal with discrimination in pay and promotion and have difficulty balancing work and domestic responsibilities. Their biggest challenge is finding adequate childcare. The women I interviewed faced similar problems and did not feel that their professional work was appreciated. In this section, I will briefly note the main reason those married chose to work and will highlight some of the constraints they face.

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<sup>240</sup> 'Alaiwat's data shows a rise in the number of working married women, a change from the results of FAFO/DOS study (Hanssen-Bauer, Pederson et al. 1998), and World Bank 1994 study (Flynn and Oldham 1999) which indicates that the number of single professional women far outnumbered the married. Hijab (1988) notes that in 1976 the percentage of married women in the work force was only 4%. According to 'Alaiwat 52.4% of the women in the labour force are married, while 42.4% of the workingwomen are single (2001, 10). It is possible that the rise in cost of living, the economic hardships, and the rise in women's education are contributing factors in attracting married women into the labour force.

<sup>241</sup> For in-depth information refer to Hijab (2001); El Kharouf (2000); Flynn and Oldham (1999); Hanssen-Bauer, Pederson et al. (1998); Sabbagh (1997); Shtewi and Daghestani (1994); Shtewi, Warikat et al. (1995).

<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, employers view married women as less reliable than single women (El Kharouf 2000; Moghadam 1998; Sabbagh 1997).

## WORK AS SELF-FULFILMENT

Work is a form of self-expression, for married and single professional women (Flynn and Oldham 1999; Sabbagh 1997; Sherif 1999). Each woman alluded to her need to develop intellectually. For many, it is the only venue they have to be themselves, or to escape the home. For some women, work was also relaxing. Most acknowledged they worked for miniscule wages, yet it brought them self-satisfaction. As one married women said,

I always felt that I had to achieve my goals through my own hard work because this is how I could establish my own self-respect. So through my own efforts I can self-actualise (Aya).

All the married professional women faced a lot of challenges at work, most of them similar to those of the single women. Both married and single women took pride in their work and their contribution to their country.<sup>243</sup> Like single women, the married women faced resistance to their entry into the labour force.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES TOWARD MARRIED PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

Kandiyoti (2001) notes that women may be let down by both the state and civil society, given the specificities of the state-society interaction. It is difficult for women to challenge directly the prevailing gender hierarchy when the state lacks a mechanism of enforcing its laws and an agency for grievances. The state's attitude towards women is still ensnared in traditional images of gender relations (Mehdid 1996). With the weak infra-structural social support and lack of readily available information for women<sup>244</sup> (Rai 1996), the majority end up being isolated and

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<sup>243</sup> El Kharouf (2000) and Sabbagh (1997) noted similar findings.

<sup>244</sup> I will elaborate on this in the next paragraph using Manal's case as an example.

dependent on their own meagre resources,<sup>245</sup> which in turn slows down the process of politicising women's issues and turning the personal into the political. These forces reinforce society's perception of women as weak and in need of protection and women's perception of themselves (Amawi 2001; Lips 1991) and their action potential. Within the work setting, women are reminded that the double standards are active and powerful.<sup>246</sup> Even if women are able to exercise power within their family, this does not necessarily mean they are able to transfer that into the public domain, since women's power is conceived as contrary to conventional femininity.<sup>247</sup> A few examples will illustrate my point.

Manal, a married woman in childbearing age, was promoted to a mid-level management post in the bank. I will briefly delineate the bank's attitude towards women in managerial posts and the banks' policy towards women who go on maternity leave. When Manal was promoted, she became a manager of a small department overseeing the work of several male colleagues, who resented having a female boss, resisted her authority and treated her as if she were ignorant

They do not accept that you understand something or that you are technically capable of making the right decision. It is something very difficult for them to be able to understand. First of all, to be in charge of men, it is blasphemy to them. They refuse - there are some who refuse to get involved in a project because, as a woman, I'm in charge of them. They cannot take it, even though I am in a higher position than them (Manal).

One of the men refused to work with Manal because she is a woman. When Manal informed upper management about her problem, rather than disciplining him, upper management transferred him to another department. The bank accommodated the man's needs rather than

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<sup>245</sup> This is especially relevant for women who do not come from well-known families and lack the necessary connections to help them out.

<sup>246</sup> An occurrence noted by Holland (1998, 179) in their work on sexuality among British youth.

<sup>247</sup> An occurrence noted by Holland (1998, 177).

pushing him to accept the changes, and in doing so, the bank reinforced the prevailing gender order of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987).

Manal was also given responsibility of managing a two-year project that involved investment of funds from 20 companies. Towards the end of the project, the bank hired a man on a temporary basis, with less qualifications and experience, to oversee her work. She believed that the bank felt insecure having a female in a decision-making post. They needed reassurance that they had made the right decision of giving the job to a woman and wanted to make sure that she did her job properly.<sup>248</sup>

I feel at the bank they are more conservative than anywhere else! First of all, the upper management is very conservative. I don't think they can handle that a woman is in charge (Manal).

Her story illustrates that ideological systems and religious beliefs<sup>249</sup> regarding women's traditional place continues to influence people's thoughts (Afshar 1999; Flynn and Oldham 1999; Hanssen-Bauer and Kharabsheh 1998). Manal goes on to say that as a female employee she has to remind her boss when she is due for her annual raise. Her male colleagues on the other hand get it automatically.<sup>250</sup>

When Manal got pregnant, she experienced a subtle form of discrimination from the bank, even though it was against the law (Sabbagh 1997). The state's new policy was intended to improve

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<sup>248</sup> Sabbagh (1997, 341) notes that men lack confidence in women's decision making.

<sup>249</sup> Moghissi notes that some men including Ayatollah Khomeini opposes women engaging in public work, because he believes that they not only disrupt work but also cause paralysis in work activities (1999, 73).

<sup>250</sup> El Kharouf notes that over half of the employers differentiate between male and female workers (2000, 142).

women's citizenship rights,<sup>251</sup> but, it had unintended consequences. As Mazen Maaitah, the President of the Federation of Jordanian Labour Unions, stated recently,<sup>252</sup> many businesses in Jordan are reluctant to hire women in childbearing age because they want "to avoid their legal obligations such as providing birth and maternity leaves."

Manal was denied her yearly promotion after her maternity leave because she had missed six weeks of work. During our interview, she questioned the bank's policy in light of its treatment of a male colleague of hers

Why should I be denied my promotion when I was off on maternity leave for six weeks, while my male colleague who was off work for four months - because of his back injury - gets a job promotion?

She also noted cases when a woman did get a raise after her maternity leave, it was a 5% raise instead of the allotted 7%. Manal was aware of the discrimination, but she did not challenge it because she believed that she would be told "if you are not satisfied, you can look for a job elsewhere." Manal felt helpless and treated her situation as if it were a private affair rather than a political one. Manal was not actively involved in any women's organization and did not know who turn to for support.<sup>253</sup> I will show in chapter five that the lack of cohesion among the women's organizations is a disservice to women like Manal. Recognising the limitations in the

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<sup>251</sup> Many feminists argue that government policies and actions are designed to protect, maintain and advance male interests (Charlton et al. 1989; Orloff 1993; Sassoon 1987; Walby 1990). The Jordanian state in 1996 increased women's maternity leave from six to ten weeks and guaranteed a woman her job upon her return from maternity leave. Moghadam (1998) delineates the caveat in the maternity leave law. She also notes that the two major banks in Jordan do not provide maternity related benefits such as child care facilities.

<sup>252</sup> Jordan Times, March 28, 2001 issue entitled "Many business still anti-women – labour chief."

<sup>253</sup> Mid-way through my fieldwork, two series of booklets edited by the lawyer Rihab Qaddumi, regarding women's legal rights in the civil service, public sector, personal status laws and other related subjects were published by "The Woman's Forum" (*Al-multaqa al-irshadi li huquq al-mar'a*). Unfortunately, these booklets were distributed to women's organisations, thus the average Jordanian woman was not aware of these valuable resources. The booklets are written for the lay public; but, lack of funding and poor publicity has limited their circulation and availability.



definition of citizenship, Werbner and Yuval- Davis (1999) call for a universal redefinition that would go beyond the notion of the relationship between an individual (male) and the state, to one which is more inclusive and sensitive to female individuals. They call for “a more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging” (p. 4).

This example deals with women’s ability to enhance their professional skills by attending workshops and conferences. Widad is the head of a department within one of the government’s ministries. She learned of an opportunity to attend a conference on her area of speciality in Iran.<sup>254</sup> Her boss Amin denied her request because as a married woman her husband would not approve, and she was not a veiled woman. She said

Of course this logic doesn’t make sense since any woman who goes to Iran, whether Arab or western, has to veil. I mean look at their reasoning. They were not interested in the qualifications of the person but rather on whether she is veiled or not. So because we are the only women in this department within the state, they [implying her immediate boss] had no excuse to deny me from going” (Widad).

Widad stated that her husband did not object to her travelling. She also stated that Amin’s reason was not logical, but she did not recognise his action as discrimination. Widad believed that her boss’s decision could have been because her appointment to a managerial post was imposed on him, and he was not in favour of having a female occupying this post.

As I said because we are imposed on him and we do our job well, he can’t say anything. But whenever there are problems in the department he’ll say it is because they [we] are women (Widad).

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<sup>254</sup> El Kharouf (2000, 142) notes that women got equal chances for advanced training in their jobs, which is contrary to what women I interviewed said.



Widad stated that her boss denied her request to offset his loss of power. He could not prevent her upward promotion, so he decided to make her work experience difficult.<sup>255</sup> She felt that Amin feared her added knowledge might give her more influence at the ministry. So he used the excuse that they needed to send a male or veiled female to pre-empt her increased influence. Unfortunately, the unintended consequences of Amin's reasoning have cumulative effects on the country. When unqualified or improper candidates are selected to attend conferences, the country as a whole suffers, as well as women, because qualified people are denied opportunities to improve their skills.<sup>256</sup>

#### SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES TOWARD VEILED PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

In my work area there was this perception that veiled women are the least productive – and their education level is simple (Farah).

The main idea in society is that women who veil are uneducated (Fatima).

Stereotypical images of the Muslim woman do not belong exclusively to the domain of the West. I was shocked when I learned from the veiled professional women I interviewed that they were perceived as being backwards and ignorant within their own Arab-Muslim country. These women experience discrimination within their work setting because they chose to veil. Elite veiled professional women in Amman were depicted as the "other." As I previously noted, the veil is associated with poor and uneducated women and not with the educated elite women. This implies that although most of the women share in common their Muslim religion, their social

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<sup>255</sup> Lips (1991) argues that when women enter traditional male jobs the message they receive is "we can't keep you out -- but we can make you want to leave" (p. 177).

<sup>256</sup> In a developing country such as Jordan, which is facing financial difficulties and lacks resources, irresponsible decisions as Amin's have ripple effects.

status in the society at large differs according to their outward appearance.<sup>257</sup> It is possible that among the Jordanian professional women (both Muslim and Christian) they associate being modern with wearing western style clothing and traditionalism (i.e. non-progressive) with wearing the *hijab* (El-Solh and Mabro 1994), the former perceive the latter through Orientalist lenses.

For example,

Some of my colleagues have advised me that wearing the *hijab* will adversely affect some of my professional aspirations and upward promotion, as the university does not welcome the idea of a veiled chair of department. Also it affects you if you are in a government post. Most people are unaware that you [as a veiled woman] are independent and have deliberately chosen to wear the *hijab* out of a deep religious conviction. You may be labelled that you are an Islamist ... They argue that you have stopped your own development (Kafa).

Kafa's statement depicts people's assumption that veiled women are pressured to veil (El-Solh and Mabro 1994) or that veiled women are Islamists (Moghadam 2001). There is a general fear among many Jordanians that veiled women enter certain occupations to recruit and convert others to become Islamist

There are schools that will hire [veiled women] and others that won't. I was rejected because - when I was originally interviewed by them [the school] I was not veiled. A year later they tried to reach me for 3 full days - they wanted me to immediately start teaching. They told my mother "Send her right away, we know her qualifications and know her capabilities and we are not interested in going through the process of interviewing other candidates - we just want her." I

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<sup>257</sup> It is important to note that in Jordan between Islamist and community of veiled women, veiling is highly esteemed. However, veiling is not valued in the same way among liberal and secularly dressed Muslim women. For a brief comparison regarding the viewpoints between secular Arab Muslim feminists and Arab Islamist feminist see El-Solh and Mabro (1994, 8-9).

went to the school and I was veiled.<sup>258</sup> The next day I was called and told “Sorry, we have found someone more experienced and we’ve hired her.” This woman was a graduate from a government school.<sup>259</sup> The school I applied to is one of the top schools in the country [a private school]. I speak English, I speak Spanish, I am presentable, I have experience and a nice personality. I think I’m more qualified than a government school graduate! When she [school administrator] saw me, she was shocked! She knows who I am. She used to be the school principal when I was a young student there! She was dying to take me [hire me]. When she saw me that day she was shocked. She said, “What did you do to yourself?” I told her, “This is it.” I am still who I am. The whole interview revolved around religion. She said, “What did you do? I know your family and I know you don’t have anyone [veiled].” The next day she apologised (Sima).<sup>260</sup>

What is revealing in Sima’s account is the school principal’s judgemental attitude towards Sima’s veiling. Sima recalled that the school principal only had her mother’s telephone number. Apparently the principal called Sima’s mother twice a day for three consecutive days, treating the matter as urgent. The minute Sima arrived at the school to sign the contract, the principal was no longer in a rush. Sima believes she was not offered the job because the school principal feared that the Islamists were successfully converting her, given her secular dress as a student. The principal knew Sima’s family and was aware that none of them veiled. Sima felt that she was the more qualified candidate.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> In between the time she first applied for the job and the time she was called and offered the job, she had veiled.

<sup>259</sup> Government schools are considered to be of a lower standard academically compared to private schools. This point was substantiated in the Arab Human Development Report (UNDP 2002).

<sup>260</sup> Sima is a married professional veiled woman who was present at a small informal focus group that took place at a participant’s home. It was at this informal focus group that I learned about the discrimination against veiled women in the work sector. I had not initially set out to find out whether veiled women experienced any discrimination, because I assumed that veiling would be acceptable in the work environment given that Jordan is a Muslim country. However, what I discovered was the opposite. That in private businesses that attract foreign customers and middle to upper class individuals there is a hidden policy not to hire veiled women, for several reasons noted above. The most common reason I discerned that businesses did not want to hire veiled women was their fear that they would be perceived as “not being modern” in the eyes of their customers.

<sup>261</sup> As a graduate from a private school her command of a foreign language was superior to that of a graduate from a government school, since the latter did not start learning English as a second language

Suhair, a recently veiled woman, noted that some of her colleagues were uncomfortable around her

One man at work asked me “Why did you wear the *hijab*?” I said, “Because I’m relaxed.” He said, “But we are not at ease.” Another thing I heard – there was someone I knew who hadn’t seen me in a long time he said: “What happened to you? I thought you were sane?” Can you believe this, someone implying that you are insane! ... I feel that my influence on the educated sector in society is increasing and is challenging the conception that only the uneducated women wear the *hijab* (Suhair).

There are several explanations for her colleague’s discomfort. First, it is possible that Suhair’s colleague perceives veiled women as assuming an air of moral-religious superiority. Second, it is likely that the veil reminds him that he is neglectful of his religious obligations. Third, it is highly probable that he associates veiling with uneducated women. To him it is inconceivable that an educated woman chooses to veil (Gole 1996; Hessini 1994).

Farah veiled a few years after she was hired at a bank located in West Amman.<sup>262</sup> After she veiled her boss started to stress the need for female employees to look feminine implying that female bank employees are “decorative items” (Freedman 2002, 168). Her boss was hinting that veiled women were not meeting the bank’s expectation of a modern woman’s dress code

I worked in a classy area. My manager, a female, she said that she wanted her female employees to have nice hair, wear make-up – so that the customers would be satisfied and happy. She wants her branch to be the best. So she transferred me to another branch. At the other branch that I was transferred to, I flourished and achieved more (Farah).

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until the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. King Abdullah II rectified the discrepancy in language skills between the private and government schools by mandating the government schools to start teaching the English language from first grade.

<sup>262</sup> The expanded part of the city, which is modern looking and has a western air.

Consequently, Farah was transferred. While there may have been other reasons for her transfer Farah believed it was linked to her act of veiling, which she noted was a discriminatory practice.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIER FOR WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL JOBS

Women working in non-traditional jobs such as drama, theatre, and journalism faced considerable challenges since society considers these professions unsuitable for an honourable woman. According to religious beliefs and cultural tradition, the most suitable professions for women to work in are health, education, and social services<sup>263</sup> (El Kharouf 2000; Fa'uri 1999).

Hind disliked working as a journalist

I became quickly aware that the profession of journalism is not considered to be a respectable profession for women in Jordan.[Interrupted by phone call – she had to reschedule her daughter's doctor appointment because of a last minute invitation to a birthday party]. Going back to journalism, I felt that people here don't respect you if you are a journalist. They look down upon you. I used to hear that people who could not succeed in any profession would become journalists [i.e. it is a profession that attracts failures], or who don't know anything or can't do anything become journalists. I always, ALWAYS hear this. This was one reason that I HATED my work there (Hind).

Hind was conscious of the condescending attitude and lack of respect accorded to her profession.

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<sup>263</sup> In a personal interview with Nawal Fa'uri (Aug. 2000) she said, "In Islam ... a woman has the right to work when she stipulates it in her marital contract". Interestingly, the participants had different views regarding the conditions under which they were allowed to work. Their differing views are also reflected in the literature. According to Fa'uri (1999, 17) Islam allows a woman to work as long as she follows the following three conditions: (1) "a woman's work must not contravene with her primary duties and obligations as a mother and homemaker", (2) "a woman must abide by the codes of Islamic behaviour which stipulates that she preserve her chastity, decency and dignity when working" and (3) "working conditions should not be strenuous, burdensome or harmful to a Muslim woman especially a mother." Roald (1998) notes that Islam does not require men or women to fulfil specific gender roles. El Kharouf (2000, 61) notes that according to Mbarak (1995) women can only work outside the home if (1) they gain their husband's/father's permission, and (2) they work in the fields of health, education, and social services. In other words, there are various views regarding the matter of women and work. These views do impact on the society's views regarding women and work.

In theatre, many people think my work is 'common' [low-class], very few appreciate it ... No-one wants to be associated with an actor, especially a dancer. No one would marry their daughter to an actor. This is *'aib*. I, myself, am not very comfortable in ... (Salwa)

With a profession in theatre, Salwa finds that her work is not respected. The stigma surrounding her job has affected her, because she is uncomfortable and has contemplated to move to Lebanon where theatre is appreciated. Sana', as a journalist is cognisant that men perceived her as loose. However, coming from a well-known and reputable family stood in her favour (Al-Abbadi 1982; Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993). Men knew that her family would defend her honour if anyone tried to go beyond the proper codes of honourable behaviour.

It helps, it sets a limit. They can't go beyond ... they are worried, if they are over rude because I have a strong family behind me ... When I interviewed men, they know I was from the [X] family, *bint 'ai'la* (the daughter of a respectable family) ... They are afraid, so they keep their distance [laughing] (Sana').

Kafa validated Sana's statement

[Your family name] gives you validity – it gives something to you – access sometimes because people say "Ah – you are from a good family – you can be trusted" (Kafa).

While a woman's family name is her source of power, it has drawbacks. Sana' and Kafa object to the assumption that they got their job because of their family name. This means that if they succeed in their jobs, they don't get the credit; their success is attributed to their family name. Women are reminded that they do not represent themselves; but their natal family and conjugal family. This pressures them to maintain their family name and infringes on their personal freedom.

My personal life gets into everything, even at [my job]. [My colleagues will say] “she comes from the [X] family, why does she need a job?” [Irritated she remarks] why do they have to become [involved] in who I am, who my father is, who my family is? Why does it [family name] have to relate to my job? (Sana’)

You cannot feel at ease. You cannot feel free. I think that is it - the feeling of not being able to do what you want to do. It doesn’t have to be bad – but being able to decide and not worrying what people might say, what people might think (Kafa).

This means that at work married women have to be extremely cautious in the way they behave and conduct themselves, since they are saddled with the “burden of representation” of three families (Mercer 1990; quoted in Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999, 13). Contrary to what some of the single women believe, marriage does not give professional married women more freedom. Lama had to be careful when talking to her clients on the phone. She had to talk to them in a formal manner; otherwise they might think that she was giving them permission to flirt with her.

I’ll choose my words carefully - otherwise they feel that you are giving them the eye [a common term used in Arabic meaning that she is inviting men to be fresh or flirt with her]. Our culture is very, very difficult. Especially if you interact with people who are not from your environment [meaning with men who are not from the same area you come from in Amman, either East or West Amman, which denotes a person’s class] (Lama).

Like single women, married women have to worry about reputation. As honourable married professional women, a certain behaviour is expected of them. This included their dress code, in order not be accused of *enticing* men, as well as their manner of speech. Even when they followed these conventions, some women still felt they were misunderstood, because of people’s gossip

I fear people now. You think they are nice, they end up saying the worst things about you (Sana’).



Women learned the importance of their honourable reputation from their earliest days. It was standard procedure to protect their reputation, as they got older. They learned to behave within a framework where they respected others and others respected them. For example, Suzie, a non-veiled Muslim woman, works in an environment where most of the women are veiled. Most veiled women perceive flashy clothes as flaunting sexuality. Her environment has caused her to be extra careful in the way she dresses. By choosing to dress modestly, Suzie maintains her honourable status in the eyes of her colleagues and reinforces the hymenization of women.

#### DOUBLE DISCRIMINATION: WOMEN WITH LOCAL EDUCATION

Locally educated women faced double discrimination at work: first, as women and second, as graduates from an Arab university.

When I was applying for jobs, I wasn't getting them. My friends who studied outside [in the West] got them just like that (Sana').

The women noted that their chances for upward promotion were slim. Some said that their work place would choose western educated women to attend training seminars. This denied them the chance of improving their educational skills and of reaching their potential. Thus the discriminatory practice could further differentiate between the skills of professionally locally and western educated women, turning the gulf into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sana's statement reflects society's negative impression of local education. Sana said that she was hired at her new job in an international organization in spite of being locally educated because her professional reputation preceded her

What helped me [get this job] is that everybody interviewing knew me because of my work, the quality of my work and that



helped, even though I graduated from the University of Jordan. Sometimes I don't blame them. I've seen some of the people who graduated with me and they had horrible, horrible standards. But at the same time, it is not fair to generalize! Many people think, "Ah, she couldn't make it outside, so that's why she studied here" (Sana').

Sana' demonstrates too that many individuals in society have a negative impression of the students who study at the local universities.

May asked her husband why he would not hire locally educated women in his company, he told her,

[Her husband] "When I interview people and realize somebody has studied here I stop interviewing them because the quality [of their education] is so bad" I said, "It is so unfair because not everybody is the same. It is true, many graduate from Jordan University in English literature, [and] they can't speak English; they can't put two words together! [Because] they memorize and write [down what they memorized] but they can't write [innovatively]" (May).

Both women point to a challenge facing the Arab governments. The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) notes that quality of education in the Arab world is poor based on the "low levels of knowledge attainment and poor and deteriorating analytical and innovative capacity" (UNDP 2002, 54). The report notes that spending on education is waning and technological development in the Arab world is weak,<sup>264</sup> because of the structural adjustment programs that the Arab states adopted. Yet as Le Vin (2002) points out, it is difficult for Arab countries to

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<sup>264</sup> The Arab world has the lowest level of access to information and communication technology in the world, even lower than sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP 2002, 29). On page five of the executive summary of the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), Arab states are reported to spend less than one seventh of the world average on research and development in sciences.

allocate large sums of money to education when 7.4% of their GDP is earmarked towards their military budget,<sup>265</sup> which is above the world average of 2.4%.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIER FOR WOMEN WITH PH.D.S

Women with Ph.D.s experienced the most resistance in their work place. This is in stark contradiction to Hijab's (1988, 130) statement on women's employment in the Gulf region that "the professions are the area where there is least resistance to women's employment." It is true that Arab countries boast that women are in professional fields, but that does not mean that women are not experiencing resistance on a personal level. For example, when Yara taught at the university, she was introduced as Yara rather than Dr. Yara

It is something embedded in their heads – women should be subordinate always – should not carry the highest title. It is reflected in their discourse, in the way they treat you – in – everything (Yara).

Yara's experience was no different from Suha, the single woman who worked at an international organisation. Both were frustrated because they were stripped of their title of "doctor." They felt insulted, disrespected and purposefully marginalized.

Lips argues that the psychological barrier against women in the public realm can mainly be explained by dual thinking, where men are stereotyped as rational, strong and powerful and women are stereotyped as weak, passive and dependent. These gender images are etched into the psyche of individuals and are difficult to dislodge. She points out that the prevailing GDP and socio-cultural attitudes and beliefs about women's participation in the public realm interact with one another (Lips 1991). Coupled with the idea that some professions have proven to be more

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<sup>265</sup> The point that Le Vin makes is the role of external power dynamics on local states.

resistant to women than others (Freedman 2002), it is no wonder that the women with Ph.D.s have frustrating experiences. Their male colleagues insisted on addressing them as Miss or Mrs. and not doctor. The prevailing gender ideology in Jordan treats professional females first as women, then as workers, and expects women to accommodate men, not challenge them.

Kafa experienced a great deal of resistance from her department when she decided to obtain her Ph.D. Her colleagues felt threatened

When I first started teaching at 'X' University I was a lecturer with a master's degree. At that time many of my students and colleagues attained their doctorate. The university, at that time, encouraged the males and not females, to pursue their doctorate and they made it easy. I was denied this opportunity. At the time my department chair even said, "Why do you want a doctorate? You are better off getting married and raising your family and home." ... So I never got the chance to go on for my doctorate. I got married and had children and continued to teach. With time I felt I started to regress professionally because all those who were hired in my department had doctorates. Also, they would refer to me as Mrs. "Y" stressing my femininity rather than focusing on the fact that I'm a lecturer. In addition, I was an exceptional lecturer, given that important public figures would have their children transferred from other branches to my branch, including decision-makers within the university itself! Ironically these same individuals would tell me that the Ph.D. certificate is not important to have but when it came to university politics [promotions] the Ph.D. certificate turned out to be crucial! I reached a level where you could not get promoted without a Ph.D. This included a ceiling in your salary if you didn't have your Ph.D. So, things became very difficult at that time (Kafa).

Once she started her doctorate, the department chair and colleagues chose to make her life more difficult rather than help her pursue her studies

I faced EXTREME difficulty from my colleagues within my department. They didn't want me to get my Ph.D. First of all, they said, "It wasn't necessary, you are already teaching and are a member of our team." I refused to accept their logic. ...

Second, the department [chair] said, "There is no reason for women to pursue their doctorate. We have men that are getting their doctorates." Third, their main excuse was that they didn't want someone who obtained their doctorate on a part-time basis. They only wanted those who obtained their doctorate on a full-time basis. They knew they had cornered me because they were aware that I couldn't leave my husband and children and study full-time. Of course things became very tenuous and I ended up having to cross many obstacles, those that were set up by the university's administration and the Ministry of Higher Education. Once I transcended those difficulties the [colleagues in her] department started to say, "How can your husband allow you to go?" They even got involved in my personal life. They even said that to his face one time. ... [My husband's response was] "I trust my wife. I have no objection if she travels and fulfils her dreams. On the contrary, we will be very happy for her if she attains her goals" (Kafa).

With all the difficulties these women faced they unanimously agreed "your Ph.D. gives your opinion legitimacy in the public eye. An education and career gives you a sense of confidence."

## CONCLUSION

Irrespective of the obstacles women faced, they felt proud that they were able to serve their country (El Kharouf 2000; Sabbagh 1997). For married professional women, work was a source of empowerment. They not only developed their personal and professional skills, but as one woman noted "working opens your eyes to many things and you start realizing that you have rights." In this chapter I show that women's relationships with their husbands are both contested and maintained. I reinforce Tucker's argument in disputing the notion of a monolithic Arab family (Tucker 1993a), by noting the existence of two major types of marriages: the egalitarian and traditional, including a transitional stage some revert to in times of crises. These forms are not rigid and immutable; rather they transform and at times turn into a controlling relationship. All the married professional women I interviewed share their need to be perceived as honourable mothers/wives. This has caused many of the women to become "supermoms", to function on

sleep deprivation, and to forgo their own leisure time. They need to double their work effort to preclude any criticism regarding their mothering, wifely duties and their professional achievements. Like single women, married women are not passive agents. They engage in their daily lives and painstakingly decide their best option even if it means that they may personally suffer for it.

A number of Muslim women have an idealistic image of marriage within the context of Islam, i.e. the conjugal relationship is based on two mature adults who are able to communicate, compromise and cooperate. They note that in a good Islamic marriage there is no room for injustice and violence. Among Islamist women, there is an assumption that a Muslim woman, because of her knowledge of her rights in Islam, will not put up with injustices. However, as noted in the cases of controlling marriages, the reality is that many of the women are influenced by the socio-religious interpretations of Islam.

Society continues to remain ambivalent in its dealings with married working women. It supports them as working women who “help out” their husbands, but sees them as encroaching on men’s territory. These views are mainly expressed in the political and moral discourses of conservatives and conservative Islamists. Consequently, married professional women faced many challenges in the workplace such as gender stereotypes regarding their professional abilities, social attitudes about the proper place of women, exclusionary practices on the part of men, and balancing home care responsibilities with employment. Many of the women who excelled professionally were perceived to have attained their status because of *wasta*, especially in the case of women who came from prominent families. Hence, for the majority of women, their family name was a burden.

This chapter also sheds some light on meaning of the veil, the deliberate choice women made to veil, the struggle some had with their husbands who opposed their veiling and the sad realisation that these women are discriminated against within the work place. What these women or others have in common is their resiliency and determination to succeed in their professional career life. They also want to maintain their marriage and set a good example because they know that they are role models. As change agents and role models, they are setting a good example, maintaining their marriage and upholding the social and religious values while making in-roads and change. They focus on maintaining certain gendered responsibilities while introducing changes gradually to ensure the continued respect and honour.

Listening to liberal women's accounts, I was struck by the steady increase in conservatism that is sweeping over the country despite the existence of highly urbanised sections in western Amman, which is referred to as "the Beverly Hills of Amman." Conservative, veiled and Islamist women are alarmed by the rapid pace of change and fear the moral decay and disintegration of the fabric of society.

Most of the liberal women I interviewed talked about their mothers wearing sleeveless tops and skirts that were above the knee. Women who are in their early to mid 40s talked fervently about the days they used to parade on campus with mini skirts. While I was interviewing one woman, her daughter told me a recent experience at her school. She was playing a part in the school play, "Grease." The words were changed to eliminate indecent language, and scenes that were suggestive were altered. The lead actress and some of the women wore low-necked blouses and apparently there was one scene suggestive of a French kiss. The play, which was originally scheduled to play for three days, was allowed to be on stage for two days. On the third evening

of the play, the Ministry of Education<sup>266</sup> sealed the doors to the auditorium with wax, preventing the play from taking place because it was considered to be immoral and obscene. This story is an example of the transitional state of Jordan, where traditional definitions and methods of operation are no longer useful, and suitable replacements are lacking. It is during these times that contradictions are at their worst (Hijab 1988, 11). Modernity is not the antithesis of tradition. The stories of MPEJW shows how they forge their way through the contradictory forces impinging on them. Against this backdrop, I will examine women's views on the Jordanian women's movement: how do they perceive it given that women are caught in the crossroads between modernity and maintaining cultural authenticity and traditional Arab-Islamic values?

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<sup>266</sup> The Ministry of Education is greatly influenced by Islamists because a large number of their staff are Islamists (see also Taraki 1995: 650).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE ACHING QUESTION, "WHO AM I? THE HONOURABLE JORDANIAN-ARAB WOMAN - A MYTH OR REALITY?"

"It is only by understanding the contradictions inherent in women's location within various structures that effective political action and challenges can be devised" (Mohanty 1988, 74).

In chapters three and four, I have alluded to the fact that professional women lack an institutionalised mechanism, a source that can address their grievances. A logical place for women to turn to would be the women's movement. Yet, when I asked the women what they knew about the women's movement, I was surprised to find out that some were not aware of the movement's activities, some didn't believe in its effectiveness and some were very cynical and remarked "do we have a movement?" implying a lack of faith in the efforts of women who are working hard to make changes. A number of women believed that the movement is fragmented, and those who are involved in it are out of touch with the reality of women's lives, or are there for personal gain/self-aggrandisement (al-Mughni 1997; Joseph 1997b). Yet, from my perspective as an outside observer, there is a quiet force, an inconspicuous one, working behind the scenes. This force is also caught in the conflicting and competing discourses that the women I interviewed find themselves in the political, moral and academic discourse. During my interviews, it was not uncommon for most of the women to say that they did not want a



“Toujan”<sup>267</sup> representing them or acting on their behalf, since most of them considered her a disgrace: the antithesis of the honourable Arab-Jordanian woman. The controversy regarding Toujan and the women’s movement is instructive for two reasons: firstly, the debate highlights the divergent viewpoints on a social level regarding “who is an honourable woman” and “how she should behave”, which are similar to the viewpoints among the professional women I interviewed. Secondly, the debate among female activists<sup>268</sup> notes the presence of competing discourses around the notion of equality; specifically the distinction between equity<sup>269</sup> and equality,<sup>270</sup> which reflects the philosophical underpinnings of the “notion of complementarity” that were stressed by the individual women I interviewed.

In this final chapter, a few issues which permeate the preceding chapters, will be highlighted. Firstly, I will ask whether a hegemonic femininity exists in Jordan. Secondly, I will point out that the three groups of professional women who emerged through my analysis (liberalist, conservative, and Islamist) are reflected within the women’s movement in Jordan. Thirdly, I will point out that the women’s movement is based on the notion of complementarity. Fourthly, I will argue that although the Jordanian women’s movement appears to be weak and apolitical, it is

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<sup>267</sup> Toujan Faisal, the first female Member of Parliament who was elected in the 1993 parliamentary elections. I refer to her by her first name, because this how men and women refer to her. It is not meant to be a sign of disrespect.

<sup>268</sup> Jordanian women who are active in women’s rights issues do not refer to themselves as feminists, because the term feminism is associated with western feminism (I will elaborate on this in the section entitled equity vs. equality). They refer to themselves as women’s rights activists. For brevity’s sake and word limitation, I will refer to these women rights activists as feminists, since this a term understood by all.

<sup>269</sup> The emphasis is on the greater good of society: social equity and maintaining family values. Women believe that they are part of society (stressing the notion of connectivity), and their demands should not jeopardise the stability of their family. Men and women work together to enhance the well being of their family and society.

<sup>270</sup> Equality is based on the principle of the Declaration of Human Rights and is perceived by most women except liberal women as a western imposition pitting man against woman. For an in-depth discussion on notions of equity and equality see: Abu-Lughod (2001); Afshar (1996b, 1999); Badran (1999, 2001); Donohue and Esposito (1992); El-Gawhary (2001); El-Solh and Mabro (1994); Gole (2000); Nelson and Olesen (1977); Stowasser (1987a, 1987b, 1998); Taraki (1995, 1996); Wadud (1999); Winter (2001).

not. Fifthly, there is a need to reiterate, “the personal is political” while the reverse also holds good i.e. what individual women personally experience is no different from what the women’s movement is facing.

Women need to have a clear understanding of the forces acting on them, especially the impact of the interplay of various factors in their lives,<sup>271</sup> if they are to reach their own definition of a modern Arab woman, and avoid having to uphold the virtuous and mythical image of the illusionary “honourable” woman. After all, “naming is an act of power” (Lindisfarne 1997, 223). By understanding the issues and challenges they face, women will have a greater chance of controlling and managing their lives (Chatty and Rabo 1997a, 19). Failure may keep women trapped in the quandary of dualistic thinking: secularism vs. religion, and modernity vs. tradition. Women need to transcend the fear of being accused of being western, anti-Arab, and/or blasphemous. They need to become clear about the implied meanings behind the accusations hurled at them (Narayan 1997) if they are to step out of the double trap: the general trap of being the bearers of cultural authenticity and Islam, and specific trap of being the repository of the family/community and nation ‘s honour.

It is apparent to me is that women are aware of the complexity of their lives. They are strategists. However, most did not understand how the various factors interact with one another and how the net outcome of the interaction affects their lives.<sup>272</sup> The dynamics on the macro level, such as the

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<sup>271</sup> Abu-Lughod (2001, 112), argues the need for Arab feminists to critique the “multiple” forms of injustice, which includes both Orientalists’ comments by the West and the failure of Middle Eastern societies and political systems.

<sup>272</sup> I was shocked when I heard the majority of women, including activists, whom I interviewed say for example, crimes of honour would be solved if the king were to abolish article 340. Or they made sweeping statements regarding Toujan’s personality, without taking into consideration the resistance she faced by certain elements in society, especially the radical Islamists. For further information see, Gallagher (1995) and Naqshabandi (1995, 139-140). In a personal interview with Leila al-Faisal, Toujan’s sister on April 5,

debate on crimes of honour and also the women's movement, reflect what is happening, on a micro-level, in the lives of individual women (Connell 1987). Both levels reflect the existing viewpoints: secular, conservative and Islamist; both are affected by international, regional, and local factors, and both are trying to forge for themselves the image of what constitutes a "modern" Arab-Jordanian woman, as they wade through the cultural confusion caused by a society in transition (Skolnick 1991). In chapter three and four (the micro level), I tried to illustrate through the examples, the interplay of the structural variables on women's lives as they struggled to protect their immaculate image as honourable women. On the macro level I noted that women are affected by the political, moral and academic discourses (see chapter one).

Both the micro and macro level bring to our attention the presence of a moral discourse: the creation of a gendered feminine identity; the honourable woman. This serves to restrict women's (as well as men's) practices to the "correct" behaviour; consequently the process of change slows down. The women I interviewed have had to invest extra effort to safeguard their honourable standing and become more resourceful and resilient as they negotiate their gendered identities while traversing the so-called private-public divide. In doing so, they constructed their honourable gendered identities while manipulating the discourse of honour. To put it differently, women are involved in their own gendering (Connell 1987; Jamieson 1999).

## HEGEMONIC FEMININITY: THE HONOURABLE WOMAN

That women have to act according to circumscribed social roles, or appear to be abiding by them, is restrictive. Privately, many stated they feel they are living for "others". They feel they have no life of their own and experience a "low grade depression", an inevitable state because of

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2000 she stated, "The Islamists dragged my sister to court. They claimed she was an apostate. Their claims were not even logical."

the lack of freedom of self-expression and self-assertion. On the one hand, women claim they want to break away from the societal gaze and be carefree. On the other hand, they harshly criticized Toujan Al-Faisal for being vocal and outspoken. Women's attitude regarding Toujan is illuminating because through their remarks it is possible to construct the social image of the honourable Jordanian woman.

Because Toujan does not fit the stereotype of the quiet, serene and submissive woman, and is opinionated, expressing her viewpoints vehemently, she is construed as unfeminine, confrontational, rude and aggressive. Thus, as Bourdieu (1977) and Connell (1987) argue, the dominant discourse and practice are involved in defining an individual's sex/gender.

There was an implicit expectation among the research participants that, as a female member of parliament (MP), Toujan was expected to have pushed for improving women's situation. Moreover, she was expected to challenge laws and regulations that adversely affect women.<sup>273</sup> The majority of women were disappointed because she did not defend women or act on their behalf. Many felt that Toujan not only failed to reverse the negative social attitudes towards women in the political arena but further eroded people's confidence in women and further entrenched the negative images of women in the public sphere (Freij 2002; Amawi 2001; PBWRC 1998) because of what the participants perceived to be her belligerent behaviour in parliament.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Though she made it clear that she was not running to improve women's lot, the women were assuming that Toujan would work for women's cause. However as Walby (1990) points out, having women as political figures does not ensure that laws will be amended to address women's practical and/or strategic needs.

<sup>274</sup> Most women were appalled by her behaviour in parliament. They claimed that Toujan yelled at the male MPs, and was rude. They depicted her as a shrew. Many conservative, Islamic and Islamist women commented on the suit Toujan wore. They accused her of deliberately wearing a red mini-skirt to the first day of Parliament, which they considered to be not only improper and dishonourable, but also provocative

What struck me during my fieldwork was the change in the participants' tone of voice and their body language when they talked about Toujan. For example, one prominent retired female public official said, "If Toujan had not aggravated the MPs in parliament, the MP would not have thrown the ashtray at her", implying that it was Toujan's fault. Few women had compassion for the position Toujan found herself in as the first female MP, in a space historically dominated by males who tend to be traditional, especially about gender roles. The fact that Toujan was outspoken and opinionated was not in her favour since it was mistaken for aggressiveness. I frequently heard women as well as men say,<sup>275</sup> "Toujan is a detriment to women. Because of her, the chances for any woman to be elected to parliament are slim"; "she is a disgrace", and one went as far as saying "she is vulgar." Perhaps it is because Toujan did not fit the mould of the quiet, understanding motherly image, she was branded as aggressive and considered not only a menace by women and men, but also dishonourable. Very few admired her courage and tenacity.

Given the predominance of this opinion among the women I interviewed, my results contest Connell's theory on gender identity: the presence of a hegemonic masculinity, and the lack of a dominant feminine gendered identity (Connell 1987, 183-190). According to my data there is a hegemonic femininity:<sup>276</sup> the honourable woman who is demure, reticent and obedient.

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with the intent of seducing male MPs. Some insisted that Toujan deliberately wore provocative clothes to Parliament on a daily basis.

<sup>275</sup> Public officials and experts I interviewed for back ground information.

<sup>276</sup> Women's views on Toujan varied, illustrating women's different attitudes, whether they are liberal, traditionalist or Islamist. The majority of women were very critical of Toujan, and felt that she created a negative image for women in society. These women reflect the conservative nature of women and their complicity in reproducing the image of a proper and honourable woman. Honourable womanhood is the corollary of hegemonic masculinity. Although Connell (1987) argues that there is no "one dominant" form of femininity, but various forms, my research disputes his argument.

Toujan presents a divergent model of femininity. As a non-conformist to the archetype of Arab femininity, defined by Sabbah (1984) as silent, immobile and obedient, her presence provoked extreme discomfort among the majority of women I interviewed. The majority of the participants perceived her as the antithesis of honourable Jordanian womanhood. She is an oxymoron because she epitomises two incompatible concepts: (i) femininity and the image of woman as weak and dependent, and (ii) power and assertiveness, associated with masculinity. Based on the participants' statements the remarks that follow are appropriate.

- Firstly, Toujan challenged the binary construction of feminine identity, the Madonna/whore complex. She resurrects the tension most women confront on a daily bases: the honourable (Madonna) and dishonourable (loose) woman (McCallum 1999), and an object of pleasure, *mut'a* (Taraki 1996). Her conduct was judged according to the ideology of the ideal honourable woman. Consequently, she challenged many of the professional women's self conceptions as honourable women because of her confrontational and assertive manner. Professional Jordanian women perceived Toujan's comportment as the betrayal of the honourable woman. Perhaps one can argue that she became a symbol of shame.
- Secondly, because some segments of society believe that a woman's voice is an '*awra*'<sup>277</sup> (al-Mughni 1993; Taraki 1996) by penetrating the male domain, flaunting her femininity with her boisterous and confrontational attitude, Toujan defied the image of the honourable woman.

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<sup>277</sup> In this case '*awra*' means that it is shameful to hear a woman's voice. In public a woman is expected to be soft spoken.

- Thirdly, her so-called provocative attire (supposedly wearing mini-skirts) hinted at her personal level of comfort with her own sexuality, mocking the ideology of a woman as ‘awra.<sup>278</sup> So women accused her of dressing seductively, on the opening day of the 1993 parliamentary session, i.e. the women invoked the discourse of *targhib*, seducing men (Taraki 1996). Ironically during my interview with Toujan, she showed me a picture of her outfit, a classic suit: long sleeved jacket with a fitted skirt barely above the knee. Toujan was accused of engaging in a sexualised display of her body in public (McCallum 1999) to entice men (Mernissi 1987a, 1991).

Toujan challenged the prevailing image of the Jordanian hegemonic femininity. She symbolized the tension between proper and improper feminine behaviour, while denoting the fine line between them. Her behaviour fuelled the moral/immoral debate, which is linked to notions of westoxification<sup>279</sup> and preserving Arab-Islamic morality. Moreover, Toujan’s comportment forced women to confront their own perceptions of their sexuality and gendered identity.

#### LIBERAL-SECULARIST, CONSERVATIVE, AND ISLAMIC-ISLAMIST PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

Three main groups of women emerged in my sample: liberal-secularist, conservative and Islamic-Islamist.<sup>280</sup> The liberal-secularists believe in Islam but don’t want religious law to be the law of the land. They advocate the separation of religion from the state, and lean towards

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<sup>278</sup> ‘*Awra* as something shameful to be covered. Literally, it means the pudendum.

<sup>279</sup> I have appropriated Afshar’s (1999) term westoxification to mean that Toujan’s mannerism of speech and dress are perceived by many Jordanian traditionalists and Islamists to be western, poisoning the moral purity of Arab-Jordanian Muslim culture.

<sup>280</sup> As noted in chapter one, I have relied on the work of Freij and Sawalha’s (2001) study.



applying secular-western values.<sup>281</sup> For them, religion is a personal issue and should not interfere with an individual's life style. Consequently, they are perceived as western. Moreover, liberal-secularist women's trendy style of dress further stigmatises them.

In general, this group is silently anxious about the growing popularity of the Islamist movement in the country and fear that it is waiting to get a political foothold to Islamify the country.<sup>282</sup> They justify their fear given the social changes the Islamists tried to implement between 1989 and 1993 while in parliament.<sup>283</sup> The women in this group tend to stress the importance of their separateness from their family. They are aware of the strong bonds of connectivity, at the same time, they want to establish for themselves a separate sense of self, where they and not their family are the epicentre.<sup>284</sup> They want to define for themselves what it means to be a modern honourable Arab woman according to a framework that places them in the centre. Western notions of individualism, as advocated in liberal theory, influence these women. They differ from the two other groups in that they lean towards the International Human Rights Declaration as a guide when making claims for their rights. Unlike the Islamic-Islamists and traditionalists, liberal-modernists complain of the snail's pace of social change.

The conservatives are concerned with the erosion of cultural traditions, local customs, and social sanctions within society (they refer to these as tribal values). They perceive their influence in

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<sup>281</sup> By this I mean liberal-secularists (both Muslim and Christian) do not mind interactions among males and females, drinking alcohol or going to discos.

<sup>282</sup> All the liberal-secular women I interviewed (both Muslim and Christian), including the feminists, articulated this fear. See Abu-Lughod (2001); Hatem (1998) Taraki (1996) who have noted similar sentiments in their studies.

<sup>283</sup> See Brand (1998 a) for more details.

<sup>284</sup> Instead of the family/extended family being considered more important than the individual, they want the individual to take centre stage, and are calling for a change in the structure of family relations.



society as waning<sup>285</sup> and are alarmed by the “rapid” social change in society. This group conflates religious values with socio-cultural practices (Freij and Sawalha 2001; Stowasser 1987a). Conservative women’s dress code varies from very conservative garb to the trendy and seductive. Like liberal-secularists, conservative women are redefining for themselves what it means to be a modern honourable Arab woman. The difference is that they want to hold on to notions of “cultural authenticity” of the Arab-Islamic heritage. As a group, they would like to modernise certain aspects of their culture. However, they are not agreed about which aspects.<sup>286</sup> They espouse a slower pace of change, and have a need to control change. They don’t want to exceed this imaginary red line.

The Islamic and/or Islamists believe that Islam is their reference point in every aspect of their life. Islam is the basis of each Muslim’s identity.<sup>287</sup> The hijab is the symbol of their value for Islam (Afshar 1996b, 1999; Gole 1996). Ijtihad is the means through which they attempt to find an Islamic interpretation for new social situations<sup>288</sup> (Afshar 1999; Noakes 1995). This group differ from the conservatives because they are clear about their definition of the modern honourable Arab woman. She is the veiled woman who is well educated, knowledgeable and acts within the parameters permitted to her in Islam.<sup>289</sup> They are able to separate out local

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<sup>285</sup> Conservatives are disturbed by what they consider to be the younger generation’s improper behaviour, who they believe are unable to distinguish between the right and wrong way of behaviour.

<sup>286</sup> Hijab (1988) pointed out in her book *Womanpower* that the notion of modernity is not clearly defined among Arab social scientists.

<sup>287</sup> It is for this reason that when the West attacks Islam, it is in essence attacking the identity of all Muslims.

<sup>288</sup> For a brief and clear in depth explanation about *ijtihad*, refer to Mahmasani (1992) and Noakes (1995).

<sup>289</sup> Some people may argue that by stressing the notion of the ideal Muslim woman, as the woman who is veiled, *muhajjaba*; the woman who respects herself and covers her sexuality, *mastura*, the veiled women are essentially advocating their denial of their own sexuality in public. However, this does not mean that they are not proud of their sexuality. On the contrary, they believe it should be preserved and only displayed to their husbands. Veiling takes several meanings (see chapter 4). The two main reasons for veiling according to the interviewees were sexually related: (1) the protection of their chastity from the lustful gaze of society, and (2) their collusion with the notion that a woman’s body is shameful (*awra*).

practices and religious beliefs. They can be further subdivided into two groups. One has a restrictive interpretation of Islam (literal interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith), whom I refer to as conservative Islamic-Islamists. The other group has a more progressive and flexible interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith. The latter are referred to as revivalists or reformists<sup>290</sup> (Afshar 1999; Badran 2001; Gole 1996). They advocate a progressive reinterpretation of Islam. They are not calling for a revolution, but for an evolution: a natural process of gradual change, adaptation and development; allowing things to unfold naturally. They tend to be against provocation and agitation<sup>291</sup>. They advocate instead shura (consultation) and compromise.<sup>292</sup> As Afshar (1999), Gole (2000; 1996), and Wadud (1999) and others point out, the Islamic-Islamist reformists believe that Islam is compatible with modernity. Islamic-Islamists (both strands) want social change and progress to be in accordance with their understanding of their religious doctrine, which explains the variant approaches of political Islamists.

For Islamic-Islamists, social change is occurring too fast. They want to know how to live an Islamic life in a modern world. Many find themselves in a difficult place as they attempt to navigate the demands of modern life within an Islamic framework (Muslim faith and law). Islamic-Islamists want the state to apply the shari'a fully and in all aspects of life. They articulate the need for change to be Islamically rather than secularly based. Their main interest is in strengthening and maintaining Islamic values. Accordingly, Arab cultural heritage (social custom) is less significant (Freij and Sawalha 2001; Stowasser 1987a; Taraki 1996). They

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<sup>290</sup> Reformists believe that *ijtihad* is permissible and encouraged; it is a practice that ensures that Islam remains the religion for every time and place (according to personal interview with Nawal Fa'uri). Many conservative women and conservative Islamists I interviewed believe that *ijtihad* is not permissible. A major explanation is related to the fact that since Sunni Muslims established the canon of Islamic Jurisprudence by the tenth century, a widespread misconception emerged that 'the gates of *ijtihad* are closed'. This fallacy still persists even though *ijtihad* is still practiced (Badran 1999; Hallaq 1986).

<sup>291</sup> These are terms women use to imply confrontation.

<sup>292</sup> Based on my personal interviews with both Islamic and Islamist women.

believe that social ills are the result of the infiltration of western values and the state's reluctance to apply the shari'a in full. Islamic women wear the veil either because they are forced or out of conviction. Among those who veil, some wear loose clothes or conservative clothes such as suits, others don a long black/brown overcoat in public, and a few wear tight fitting clothes while wearing the hijab.

Islamic-Islamists and conservatives are afraid that the current generation of youth is under the threat of losing its identity because of the encroachment of western values and attitudes on Jordanian culture. They are fearful that the West is attempting to liberalize the country. These three main views that I have discerned are reflected in the different strands of the women's movement.

## WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN JORDAN

The Jordanian women's movement is mobilised around the question of citizenship. Their interest is in changing the laws regarding the family book, passport, and social security rights while maintaining the cohesiveness of the family structure. They fear that too much change in gender relations, i.e. increased women's freedom, will destroy the family's cohesiveness and connectivity. Their assumption is influenced by the cultural-Islamic ideology that both the social order and a healthy society are based on a stable family structure (Afshar 1999; Joseph 2001). The women's movement is trying to strike a balance between introducing change in the personal status laws and other legal inequities and maintaining family connectivity (Al-Tall 2001; JNCW 1993, 1998). In general, women's interests are not framed in western terminologies of "freedoms", such as sexual freedom or the ability to work, but rather revolve around "equitable social rights". In this way, Jordanian women do not identify with western feminism. Their sexual politics are the outcome of their own personal experience (Connell 1987) and their activism is

based on their perspectives (Randall 1998). As Afshar (1996a, 1999) notes, Third World Women use concepts like motherhood, or “complementarity” rather than equality, to pursue particular goals such as seeking resources, welfare and /or freedom from oppression for their children.

All the participants in this research argue that both men and women in Jordan are dominated by various systems of authorities.<sup>293</sup> Women acknowledge the different forms of oppression. Jordanian feminists, like other TW feminists, stress that cultural, economic and national sovereignty are important concerns, which at times may be contrary to the forces of globalisation (Freedman 2002; Minh-ha 1989). The women made it clear that Jordanian men, unlike western men, do not have significant advantages over them. In the women’s eyes, the only distinction between them and men is that they are further subjected to male authority. Irrespective of their religious beliefs, all the women believe in the notion of complementarity,<sup>294</sup> i.e. men and women are equal yet by virtue of their different biological natures each has a different social role to fulfil. To think otherwise implies a breach with God’s law. Feminists recognise the centrality of the family in their lives. Complementarity ensures the stability of society and the maintenance of social justice (Afshar 1999; Fa’uri 1999; Wadud 1999). They argue that Islam’s major concern is with the well-being of society, and the need for social justice to prevail, i.e. Islam is concerned with equity rather than equality. Or as Stowasser (1987a, 265) states, the concern is with “the Islamic weal as a whole and not with women’s rights per se.” One Jordanian feminist said,

Islamic law does not condone any distinction of rights between women and men, except in matters related to their natural dispositions and physical capabilities, so as to create

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<sup>293</sup> Women are against turning their concerns into only a woman’s issue. They made it clear that they want to avoid separating their concerns from those of men, since both are suffering from effects of neo-colonialism. My findings corroborate Afshar (1996a) and Freij’s (2002) work.

<sup>294</sup> For a critique of the concept of “equality” and western feminists’ resistance to the notion of complementarity see Nelson and Olesen (1977). For an in-depth analysis on the notion of complementarity see Afshar (1999), Fa’uri (1999) and Wadud (1999).

compatibility between them ... and to serve the interests of both men and women and to benefit all of society. ... For it is an established scientific and biological fact that women and men differ in their physical structure. These natural differences necessitate balancing the rights and responsibilities of each according to their capability, so that human beings may continue to live in harmony, peace and tranquillity (Fa'uri 1999,13, 39).

By focusing on complementarity, women perceive themselves as belonging to the human race that includes also men; the focus shifts from “the two divided parts to the principle of partition itself” (Delphy 1993, 3). Many feminists dismiss the idea of treating women’s issues as a separate matter. They stress their domestic identity and their connectivity to their family and community. They believe that women are part of society and do not exist in isolation from men (Freij 2002). Thus, women stress the relational, interactional and interdependent aspect of their relationship with men. There are a few women who stress the virtue of complementarity because it offers them different entitlements from men, since they believe that the man’s duty is financial support of the family.<sup>295</sup> For this reason that I decided to refer to Jordanian feminism as “Complementarity Feminism”. Jordanian women defined their own brand of feminism, which is based on their “politics of location” (Freedman 2002).

#### EQUITY VS. EQUALITY

The notion of equity is linked with the greater good of society whereas equality is seen as an individualistic aspiration, which is not necessarily beneficial for society at large. For this reason Jordanian women favour complementarity over equality. In their minds, equality is linked to notions of western feminism, a term loaded with disparaging associations including

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<sup>295</sup> Personal interview on June 25, 2000 at IAF headquarters in Amman with feminist Islamists Arwa Kilani and Asma Farhan.

colonialism,<sup>296</sup> imperialism, sexual immorality<sup>297</sup> and men-haters.<sup>298</sup> For them, the term “feminism” is associated with “western feminism” which implies cultural betrayal (Abu-Lughod 2001, 1998). To complicate matters further the question of the Arab-Jordanian woman is linked with the larger debate on Arab identity,<sup>299</sup> Arab culture (Elsadda 2001), religion (Badran 2001), and nation’s honour (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999), the country’s struggle for an independent political and economic identity vis-à-vis the rest of the world (Joseph and Slyomovics 2001; Nelson and Altorki 1997), and the establishment of a sound mode of development (Hijab 1988). As Mani remarks “women become sites upon which various versions of scripture/tradition/law are elaborated and contested” (1998, 72). Unfortunately, the interconnection of the woman’s question with the above issues slows down the process of change for women, especially since the state/establishment is involved in addressing these matters simultaneously (Hijab 1988). Because the issues are linked, a change in one will inevitably have effects on the others, and the outcome is not always predictable (Connell 1987; Wendt 1999). This means firstly, the necessity to locate Jordanian feminism within the framework of the national debates where national,

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<sup>296</sup> Historically, this accusation can be traced back to the colonial and post colonial times, when feminism was associated with the West and perceived as subverting national interests, akin to treason (Ahmed 1992; Badran 1999).

<sup>297</sup> It is no surprise that Jordanian women misunderstand western feminism, given the way it has been portrayed in western popular literature as bra-burning women, women as men haters, and home-wreckers (Steinem, 1985a; 1985b). The explicit sexual scenes in the Hollywood movies have served to perpetuate the myth that all western women are promiscuous, putting their selfish needs before those of their family. Consequently, women’s freedom in Jordan has become associated with sexual freedom. When asked, “What does freedom mean to you?” the majority of (professional elite Jordanian women) PEJW responded “not sexual freedom” but “freedom to think and freedom of choice”, indicative of their fear of being implicated with sexual freedom. Islamist and conservative women went as far as denouncing the way western women dress – “displaying all their wares like a piece of meat hanging in the market place.” Islamists and conservatists implicate western feminism with influencing “poor and gullible young Jordanian women who don’t know any better, steering them away from God’s path.” Conservative and Islamic women are struggling with the fact that their daughters, nieces and/or female relatives dress provocatively, what they refer to as “obscene.”

<sup>298</sup> Refer to work by Abdo (1997); Abu-Lughod (2001); Afshar (1996); Ahmed (1992); Arebi (1991); Badran (1999); El-Solh and Mabro (1994); Hijab (1988); Karam (1998); Nelson and Altorki (1997).

<sup>299</sup> Nelson and Altorki (1997), and Naqshabandi (1995) stress that the question of the identity of Arab society is the most pressing problem facing Arab nations.

regional and international interests and powers intersect (Chatty and Rabo 1997b). Secondly, the need to remember that the outcome of women's demands are influenced by the state's strategic interests and needs, as they are affected by internal<sup>300</sup> and external factors<sup>301</sup> (Wendt 1999).

## THE WEB OF COMPETING DISCOURSES

The women's movement in Jordan is influenced by the academic debates on feminism, and the local political and moral discourses (Naqshabandi 1995). These are impacted by (a) the international debate on human rights (Fraser 1999; Gallagher 2001) (b) the political-economic issue of aid that is hinged on political matters such as the promotion of democracy, civil society, an open market economy (El-Baz 1997; Moghadam 1997), and normalising relations with Israel (Bint Talal 2001; Brand 1999; Lynch 1999; Piro 1998) (c) the regional discourse on waning pan-Arabism and revivalism of pan-Islam (Badran 2001; Beinun and Stork 1997b; Boulby 1999; Hopkins and Ibrahim 1997; Moaddel 2002) and (d) the unresolved issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Joseph 2001; UNDP 2002).

It is beyond the scope of my thesis to discuss all these points in detail.<sup>302</sup> My purpose is to contextualise the Jordanian women's movement and to highlight the diverging viewpoints between Jordanian feminists. By contextualising it, the women's movement can be examined within its Arab-Islamic framework and its kinship social network (Joseph 1997a; 1999b; Joseph and Slyomovics 2001). To strip this debate from its Arab-Islamic-family kinship context would lead to a misreading of the women's movement, as in Laurie Brand's work (1998b). Brand

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<sup>300</sup> Such as the domestic alliances, for example, the state with Islamists, and the state with the ruling elites that at times are opposed to women's rights.

<sup>301</sup> External factors include international donor agencies, international foreign policy and international human rights groups. Wendt refers to these as exogenous factors.

<sup>302</sup> For a more detailed examination of the impact of these discourses on the women's movement in the Arab world refer to Abu-Lughod (2001, 1998); Badran (2001, 1999), Karam (1998), and Naqshabandi (1995).



delegitimised the Jordanian women's movement by making it appear to be controlled by the establishment.<sup>303</sup> The women's movement in Jordan differs from its counterpart in Egypt, Palestine, and Algeria because of, what I refer to, its "benevolent relationship" with the establishment.<sup>304</sup> The alliance between the movement and royal family has and remains contentious. The alliance has caused hard feelings among the feminists themselves, which in turn has fuelled a raging debate between feminists.

There is a split among those who feel they are being pressured to comply with the agenda of the establishment and are resisting co-optation, and those who believe that the royal family is improving women's situation. Given this background, it is not surprising to find the women's movement getting caught within contentious debates of secularists, conservatives and Islamists, and that women's rights remain an acrimonious issue. Before examining the relationship of the women's movement with the establishment, I will briefly comment on the evolution of the movement.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Brand failed to include the cumulative effect of the interaction of historical, cultural, socio-religious and political factors in her analysis of the relationship of women and the state, specifically, the role of historical events as they effect individuals, and the role of the royal family. She dismisses the role of women as active agents engaged with the state and portrays women as pawns being acted upon from the top, distorting the reality.

<sup>304</sup> During the conference "Contemporary Issues For Jordanian Women" held in Amman, March 28-29, 2001 Jordanian feminists made it a point to stress that Jordanian feminism differs from Egyptian feminism.

<sup>305</sup> The reason I quickly glance at the movement's development is to give the reader a brief historical background. It is beyond the scope of my work to provide a thorough critique of the movement since its inception.



## OVERVIEW OF JORDANIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

With the institution of martial law in 1957, the Jordanian feminist movement came to an abrupt halt.<sup>306</sup> Their existence was only possible within charitable organizations, transforming their work from political to charitable<sup>307</sup> (Amawi 2001; Al-Emam 2000; Al-Tall 1985, 2001; Hammad 1999), appearing apolitical. The advance of global feminism (Chatty and Rabo 1997b; Moghadam 1997; Naqshabandi 1995) and the state's realisation that women are a source from which to claim foreign aid elevated their status from merely mothers to strategic allies (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999b). The royal family's liberal outlook, and their desire to be a modern-Arab state, allowed women to become politically active with reservations. Women could not be given free rein as it would signal the establishment's tacit approval of complete democratisation in the early stages of the political liberalisation process, implying unrestrained activity for political parties, an unthinkable move for the establishment given the historical events in the mid to late 1950s (Abu-Odeh 1999; Al-Tall 1985; Amawi 2001). Then, with women's influential ties as gatekeepers to social networks (Chatty and Rabo 1997b), their unrestricted political activity could mobilize the public with dire consequences to the state (al-Mughni 1997), since feminists in the past were affiliated with opposition political parties (Al-Tall 1985; Amawi 2001). Also, the establishment could not afford to be seen as favouring women over other groups such as

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<sup>306</sup> The start of the Jordanian feminist movement can be traced back to 1954, when the Arab Women's Union was founded, headed by Emily Bisharat, a female lawyer. During that time the issue of women's right to vote and run for parliament was brought up. In 1956 the Union called for modifying the personal status law and abolishing polygamy (Naqshabandi 1995; Al-Tal 1985). The movement remained strong until it was abruptly halted in 1957 with the institution of martial law in the Kingdom. Furthermore, it could be argued that King Hussein who was struggling to secure his legitimacy could not afford to upset his allies by appearing sympathetic to women's cause. Staunchly supporting women would politically destabilize the monarchy and jeopardize his rule, because his views would be seen as unacceptable. For an excellent overview of the women's political activities and demands see (Amawi 2001, chapter 2). Also see Brand (1998a; 1998b), Moghadam (1998, 127-152); Naqshabandi (1995). With regard to the latest debates about women's quota see Amawi (2001); Freij (2002); Naqshabandi (1995).

<sup>307</sup> The women's movement in the Arab world is considered to be an NGO movement (Karam, 1998). Jordan is no exception.

Islamists. The monarchy's stability rested on maintaining its "good" relationship with these factions (Boulby 1999; Moaddel 2002; Freij and Robinson 1996).

The establishment struck a benevolent bargain with women; they could have a formal platform from which they could challenge the state, using their "formal citizenship rights" as a springboard in their demands for "equal citizenship status" (Pettman 1999), but only under the tutelage of Princess Basma. The establishment cemented this bargain by establishing the Jordanian National Committee For Women<sup>308</sup> (JNCW) in 1992. Moreover, it gave the JNCW a semi-government status, allowing it to be political given that it has responsibility for overseeing state policies pertaining to gender mainstreaming and laws discriminating against women. Legally, women's organisations (NGOs) are restricted to charitable work (Al-Kutba and Konrad-Adenauer 1998). This further limited the women's movement to the sphere of NGOs, and ensured that the women's movement is an NGO movement<sup>309</sup> (Karam 1998; Naqshabandi 1995). Perhaps it could be argued that the royal family attempted to bring about change by working within the system. However this caused a rift among the feminists.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> It was established in 1992 to reflect the desire of the government to optimise the participation of women in economic, social and political life (JNCW 1993). JNCW consists of a body of representatives on women's issues from both the private and public sector. JNCW is responsible to oversee all the state's policies and laws regarding women, and recommend changes favouring women. Princess Basma is the royal patron of JNCW. Through a royal decree JNCW is responsible for overseeing and addressing inequities in the law and mainstream gender issues. There is an implicit assumption that it represents all women's NGOs.

<sup>309</sup> Internationally, NGOs act as pressure groups, i.e. they have power. But in Jordan, NGOs are neutralized. After Black September (1970s), the majority of NGOs had royal patronage, a pre-emptive measure allowing the establishment control over them. This movement created the nickname of RNGOs (royal NGOs) or RINGOs (royal imposed NGOs) among society and some members of the scholarly community (Brand 1998a). RNGOs give the illusion of democracy but in reality these institutions are guided by the establishment's agenda. However, this simplistic explanation is dangerous in a society where change is orchestrated from the top down. The royal family is considered to be a change agent, modern and forward-looking. Changes instituted by the royal family are considered legitimate, and are more likely to be accepted. For a critique on RNGOs refer to (Abdallah 2000).

<sup>310</sup> In the section "current raging debates" I delineate the major concerns feminists articulated while conducting my research. These debates are ongoing. It is beyond the scope of my thesis to delve deeply into this matter. At the same time I could not ignore them.

Protagonists of the “bargain” felt that the JNCW empowered rural women who would otherwise be marginalized, since JNCW spread their work to rural areas and focused on educating rural women on their rights. Concomitantly, the protagonists were aware of their need to frame and present policy recommendations regarding women’s issues in a moderate, cautious and conservative manner if they were to gain the support of decision-making officials.

Feminist opponents were disturbed by this “bargain” and wondered how this situation would affect the women’s movement in Jordan. Would Jordanian women be able to form their own political feminist group, or would the JNCW overtly fill that vacuum? Would it be possible for them to be politicised if Princess Basma guided them? Some felt that the JNCW was forced on women’s organisations and were unhappy about the co-option of the women’s movement. They felt that JNCW as an RNGO was disempowering women since decisions were and are top-down, precluding women from contributing to the feminist consciousness and/or feminist process. Some perceived JNCW as serving the interests of the leader of the organization. A common remark uttered by them is “you don’t have a movement when a member of the royal family is in charge.” One of the main reasons feminists object to RNGOs is related to funding. The scarce funding has contributed to an atmosphere of rivalry, competition and envy among the various NGOs and feminist groups (Naqshabandi 1995), which has fuelled the competition among the various groups who are vying to take over the leadership position, reducing the possibility of team-work, which is already weak. Because of the divergent viewpoints among feminists, the competition between them propelled each group to delegitimise the others (Lindisfarne 1997). A major disadvantage of the lack of cooperation is that it not only weakens their effectiveness, but also gives the illusion that women don’t really know what they want.

## NGOS – A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Wiktorowicz (2000) argues that in the Middle East social scientists need to rethink their assertion that civil society can act as a tool to empower citizens (Zubaida 2001). As Chatty and Rabo (1997b) assert, the existence of civil society does not guarantee democracy. Wiktorowicz contends that as long as state practices and regulations keep organizations under their control there is little chance that they can act as “conduits for freedom” (p. 58). To him, NGOs end up acting as surveillance mechanisms of the state, ensuring the state’s disciplinary power, because the state regulates public meetings, establishment of NGOs and political parties. These laws ensure that NGOs are not politicised, restricting political activity to political parties.<sup>311</sup> The state’s deliberate set up of controlling civil life is analogous to Bourdieu’s (1997) concept of “symbolic violence”, because the state’s direct coercion is disguised in the form of NGO state-regulations.<sup>312</sup> However, in Jordan the fact that the JNCW represents women’s issues does not mean that it is controlled by the state, because of the relationship feminism has with the establishment, one that is premised on the benevolent relationship.

## BENEVOLENT RELATIONSHIP: ROYAL FAMILY LEADING SOCIAL CHANGE

The relationship between the king and the public in Jordan is premised on an interactive process in which the norms of obedience to the king are rewarded by the king’s compassion to his subjects. As a result, expectations are created, where the subject turns to the benevolent monarch as an intermediary (*wasta*) between the individual and the state. This not only reinforces the

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<sup>311</sup> Political parties are tightly regulated. They have to be approved by the ‘security department’ to be legitimate. For detailed information, refer to the article by Wiktorowicz (2000). Also see Al-Kutba and Konrad-Adenauer (1998).

<sup>312</sup> I am not using Bourdieu’s (1977, 183-197) exact definition of the term symbolic violence, but rather the essence of the meaning of his concept. Bourdieu uses the term symbolic violence to mean a disguised form of power relation, which is cloaked in moral and/or affective obligations, i.e. through the services or favours you do on behalf of another person, that person is indebted to you.

belief in the subject that the monarch is someone to be trusted and loved, but also is her/his *wasta*. This process achieves three things: firstly, it not only legitimises the monarch but also shows his human face thus undermining any opposition to him; secondly, the benevolent relationship creates and perpetuates a self-image that the monarch is needed while performing his legal and parental duties; thirdly, the benevolent relationship disempowers the state structures or maintains their weak status vis-à-vis the monarch. There is a backlash to this, individuals fail to appreciate the process of democracy and how to work with state institutions, since citizens continue to rely on old customs and practices of patronage and the political symbolism of the monarch. This prevents societal elements from being able to mobilize against the monarch.

The role of the royal family in improving women's situation is misunderstood, especially in the West, perhaps because of the existing model of royalty within Europe where the royal families assume a low profile. Due to the historical circumstance of the genesis of Jordan, the royal family had to be involved in the micro<sup>313</sup> and macro<sup>314</sup> management of the country. Aware that rapid change and direct confrontation produces backlash, the royal family opts for an incremental introduction to change. In this manner, they gradually build their support, to minimise male resistance.

Perhaps it is possible to say that the late king knew that men hold women back, so to decrease the structural barriers he, as well as King Abdullah II, utilised female members of the royal family to create inroads for women in public life, since citizens are less likely to oppose them and are accustomed to the top-down approach to change.

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<sup>313</sup> Through NGOs, especially those that it patronises, and recently the creation of the E.C.C. (Economic Consecutive Council) in Jordan.

<sup>314</sup> Through personally searching for financial assistance since it is a rentier state.

For example, Princess 'Aisha (the King's sister), a graduate from The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, established the "Directorate for Women's Affairs" in the military to promote the military as a respectable profession for women and to offer them non-traditional careers, e.g. radar control and military intelligence jobs. Princess Basma, the King's aunt, is actively pushing for legislative changes favouring women through the JNCW.<sup>315</sup>

In an interview with Princess 'Aisha (2 March, 2000) she stressed that she had to choose her battles carefully and work on them diligently. For example, if she puts forth recommendations and no change transpires within six months, she holds out until the right person in the decision-making position is promoted/appointed who would recommend her ideas. To minimise resistance to her new ideas, she gently introduces change through her strategy of the "buddy system." Instead of directly appointing a female officer into a decision-making position, she resorts to teaming up the female officer with a male officer. This way, she gradually introduces the concept of a female officer in a decision-making post. Her technique forces the male officer to work with his female counterpart. If a problem such as sexual harassment arises, Princess 'Aisha deals with it quietly so as not to alarm the family.<sup>316</sup> She stated that if she were to announce publicly such an issue, it might backfire: the female officer's family would force their daughter to leave the service.<sup>317</sup> In addition, a public announcement would jeopardise future entry of potential female officers.<sup>318</sup> To her, broaching the issue publicly is a time issue where she would publicly introduce the issue when the right people are in the right place at the right time to back her up.

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<sup>315</sup> Princess Basma, on the other hand, works quietly behind the scenes convincing senators and MPs. It can be argued that the JNCW is challenging the gender order within the framework of the Arab-Islamic framework, relying on the support of men as well as women.

<sup>316</sup> Sexual harassment remains a taboo subject.

<sup>317</sup> In order to protect their family's honour.

<sup>318</sup> A public announcement may inadvertently give the message to people that all females who work in the military will be sexually harassed.

Promoting the practice of discreet operation ensures the viability of the project in its infancy when it is vulnerable to attacks. Her decision to provide a simple public explanation, rather than a detailed one, is her way of safeguarding against the possibility that someone might use her arguments against her. Princess 'Aisha's approach symbolises the approach of the royal family of deliberately not publicising their projects for fear of providing their opposition with ammunition to derail their project. They are not in favour of following the western approach of announcing their intention before knowing whether the project will fail or succeed. They believe that their approach is culturally sensitive.<sup>319</sup>

#### CURRENT DEBATE RAGING AMONG JORDANIAN FEMINISTS

The major debate among Jordanian feminists revolves around the following five central issues.

1. How to bring about change? Should it be imposed or should it be brought about incrementally by slowly convincing people of the merit of specific changes?
2. What type of change is sought? Should the change be radical (i.e. western feminism), modernising the existing Arab-Islamic cultural practices, or purely Islamic?
3. What foundation to use? Should it be based on the shari'a (restrictive and/or progressive interpretation) or the Declaration of International Human Rights?
4. How to define equality? Should it be based on the notion of equity or equality?

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<sup>319</sup> Some may perceive this approach to be manipulative. However, it is not constructed with the aim of being manipulative, rather, with the aim of bringing about change with the least resistance, given the precarious balancing act the royal family have to undertake. It is important to note that royal family shares in the dilemma that feminists and the general public face "to what extent to push for change?" They also fear losing the family values in the process of change.



5. What is the role of the royal family in the movement? Is their involvement considered helpful, interference, or domination?

This polemic debate came to the fore during the two-day regional Arab Conference entitled the Personal Status Laws in the Arab World - Theory and Practice and the Possibility For Reform<sup>320</sup>. A heated debate ensued among all the Arab feminists, splitting the Arab region into two camps: the Maghrib,<sup>321</sup> calling for the separation of religion from state, and the Mashriq favouring the application of the shari'a. The two camps had the same end results in mind (justice, equality and dignity for women), but they differed about the means. Consequently, the Mashriq was dubbed the "pro-religious group" or the conservatives, while the Maghrib was referred to as anti-religious and/or the opposition.

The Mashriq argued the need to re-evaluate the current language of the law.<sup>322</sup> They believed that changes should keep in mind the general welfare of the whole society rather than be based on the individual needs of women, since this approach is narcissistic and western-oriented, encouraging the breakdown of society and the family. Apparently there were a few Jordanian feminists who wanted to side with the Maghrib but were afraid of being labelled as the opposition, and risking losing the (future) support of the royal family. The debate symbolises the ambivalent attitudes individuals, groups and the state have regarding both the meaning of modernity and feminism. Al-Ali (1997); al- Mughni (1997); Gole (1996) note the state in the Middle East plays a covert/overt role in shaping the women's movement, which can be

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<sup>320</sup> Held on the 24th and 25th of June 2001, under the auspices of Princess Basma and funded by Konrad Adenauer Foundation

<sup>321</sup> *Maghrib* comes from the root word in Arabic *gharb*, which means west. This term is applied to the Arab countries located in the western region of the Arab world, such as Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt. *Mashriq* originates from the Arabic root word *sharq* meaning east. *Mashriq* denotes the Eastern countries in the Arab world such as Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

<sup>322</sup> To fit in with needs of modern life in the Arab world.



problematic since “ambivalent attitudes about modernity in countries with a colonial heritage result in the production of mixed, often contradictory messages to women” (Elsadda 2001, 41).

I will now turn to the manner in which the three typologies of professional women are reflected in the women’s movement.

## COMPLEMENTARITY FEMINISM

In Jordan, the existing feminism is what I call “complementarity feminism” (CF), denoting Jordanian women’s standpoint. It is based on the argument of the “natural laws of complementarity” (Afshar 1999, 153) whereby each sex has its own specific role and each function in accordance to its natural disposition ensuring fulfilling lives. Their roles are complementary, and of equal value and importance, promoting what is known in Arabic as *al maslaha al ‘amma*, the general public’s good/interest, as well as the family’s well being. Essentially, they strive for a harmonious coexistence.

I have identified three types, complementarity secular feminism (CSF), complementarity Muslim feminism (CMF), and complementarity Islamist feminism (CIF). All share in common the notion that women and men complement one another,<sup>323</sup> and cooperation between the sexes is quintessential in building healthy families and a stable society. Motherhood is valorised and women’s femininity is stressed. They believe that both men and women are subjugated<sup>324</sup> and therefore, refuse to talk only about women’s subjugation, since all members of society are oppressed. The women refer to themselves as women activists and vehemently oppose the term

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<sup>323</sup> The distinction between them is context and issue bound rather than clear-cut differences. Though they agree on certain issues, they differ on political convictions, reasons for women’s oppression and the measures needed to rectify the injustice.

<sup>324</sup> By both international policies (structural adjustment policies), western and Israeli politics as well as lack of political and democratic freedoms in Jordan (Al-Ali 1997; UNDP 2002).

feminist.<sup>325</sup> Both Christian and Muslim women contest the western definition of feminism, which to them advocates an antagonistic relationship between men and women.<sup>326</sup> Unlike western feminism, which they perceive devalues motherhood and robs women of their choice of staying at home to nurture their family, their role as nurturers is esteemed. They are proud of their choice of being wives and mothers (Afshar 1999). For them the notion of complementarity respects a woman's choice and her obligations throughout her life cycle.

### COMPLEMENTARITY SECULAR FEMINISM (CSF)

As a group, their discourse is based on the international human rights discourse. There is a great deal of friction between them and the complementarity Muslim and Islamist feminists. Because they ask for equal rights, they are considered by the two other groups as undermining the Jordanian family and social structure.<sup>327</sup> Furthermore, CSF's liberal discourse is perceived to champion a western paradigm of modernisation towards women. CSF are small in number and tend to be silent, except for the out spoken lawyer and human rights activist Asma Khader,<sup>328</sup> for

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<sup>325</sup> My results concur with the work of other feminist scholars writing about feminism in the Arab world. See Al-Ali (1997); Badran (1999); Karam (1998); Nelson and Olesen (1977).

<sup>326</sup> I am using the term West as it is used by Jordanian women, a generic term denoting countries that are non-Arab-Islamic. The majority of Jordanian men and women do not distinguish between the various forms of feminisms that exist in the West. Western feminism is perceived as a monolithic entity that advocates an adversarial attitude between men and women and is blamed for the demise of the family and societal values.

<sup>327</sup> Gender and human rights are seen as western concepts, not indigenous, even when human rights activists are involved in forming their own the local version (Abu-Lughod 1998, 2001; Badran 1999; Elsadda 2001; Karam 1998). One of the participants, Su'ad stated that Jordanian feminists are automatically labelled as western which causes them to justify their work rather than devoting their energy to what they want to do. She is of the opinion that Jordanian feminists fear being stigmatised consequently they impose self-censorship.

<sup>328</sup> Having watched Asma Khader in action several times, she uses the strategy that Mernissi (1987b) advocates – to make inroads and increase her chances of success Khader works with the forces in place. She points out their contradictions to push further for sexual equality. She works within the social context subverting it by focusing on its own contradictions. Her approach differs from that of the royal family as I will be showing.

fear of being accused as radicals, social agitators, and pro-West.<sup>329</sup> Another reason they maintain a low profile is that the International Human Rights Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are not perceived by all Jordanian and Arabs as being neutral and/or universal conventions, given that Arab people “are extremely disillusioned with international politics that have consistently worked against their interests, and where claims to uphold ‘universal’ values and ‘ethical’ positions always seem to blunder whenever they are concerned” (Elsadda 2001, 58-59).

Elsadda goes on to say that those who advocate the international human right approach fail to recognise the role that identity politics plays.

Identity politics intensify and take hold exactly at the moment when claims to ‘universal’ rights or justice fail to deliver rights for particular groups of people or particular cultures and when international conventions are perceived as culturally specific expressions of dominant values and norms (ibid).

Complementary secular feminists believe that democracy, freedom and equality can be achieved within an Islamic framework in a “loose sense.” They call for modernising cultural norms in accordance with the demands of modern life.

#### COMPLEMENTARITY MUSLIM FEMINISM (CMF)

Members of this group base their discourse on upholding the Islamic-Arab heritage. They stress the need to safeguard the “authentic” Arab cultural traditions. They call for cultural loyalty and advocate gradual change. As Muslims, they situate their demands for change within the Islamic

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<sup>329</sup> When feminists are labelled “western” the intent is to simply shame them into silence. As Narayan (1997) notes the process of selecting, labelling, and rejecting certain practices as western is highly selective. “What counts as ‘westernisation’ seems to vary considerably with time and place and community, and the very things that were forbidden in its name to women of one generation, such as employment outside the home, often seemed to become commonplace in the next” (p. 28).

discourse while incorporating aspects of the human rights discourse. They strongly advocate the complementarity of the sexes. They believe that “a feminism that does not justify itself within Islam is bound to be rejected by the rest of society and is therefore self-defeating” (Karam 1998, 11). Complementarity Muslim feminists are perceived by society as moderates because their demands are considered reasonable. On a continuum, they would fall in between CSF and CIF.

Generally, complementary secular feminists and complementary Muslim feminists are wary of Islamists and perceive complementarity Islamist feminists as an extension of Islamists.<sup>330</sup> Unlike the view of CIF, veiling is considered a woman’s prerogative by CSF and CMF. Some of the leading figures in this group are Princess Basma<sup>331</sup> and members of her NGOs, and most of the participants in my research.<sup>332</sup> Perhaps it can be argued that CMF can be considered as the “state feminism.”<sup>333</sup> Some of the veiled Muslim women fall into this group.

#### COMPLEMENTARITY ISLAMIST FEMINISM (CIF)

The female Islamists argue that there is a difference between them and the Jordanian Muslim woman. They are committed to Islam, whereas the average Muslim Jordanian woman may not be totally committed to the ways of Islam. For Islamists, Islam is their faith, a way of life, and provides answers to social issues and solves social problems. To them it is impossible to separate religion from other aspects of life. Thus, their demands are based on Islam, and they use the language of duties and obligations. For them Islam liberates people and privileges women,

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<sup>330</sup> Abu-Lughod (2001) comments that many moderate and liberal Arabs fear Islamists’ agenda.

<sup>331</sup> Perhaps Princess Basma is paying lip service to the conservative elements of society and Islamists. She wants to avoid being perceived as radical or western. In this manner, she can gradually introduce the necessary changes without ruffling conservative and Islamists’ feathers.

<sup>332</sup> Jordanian Christian women are part of this group and of CSF.

<sup>333</sup> As Stork noted in his interview with Joseph this form of state-endorsed feminism has resulted in some significant gains for women in legal rights (Joseph 1997a).

since husbands are expected to support their wives financially (nafaqa). They insist that Islam honours women.<sup>334</sup>

Islamist feminists are members of the political Islamist movement, whose ultimate goal is the Islamisation of the state. Islamist feminists accuse secularist feminist of being subversively linked to the imperialist West, and of undermining Islamic values, especially those related to the private/family sphere. CIF is subdivided into the liberal-moderate camp and the conservatives. The reformists call for a progressive interpretation of Islam, and advocate a spiritual interpretation since they believe that Islam is a religion for all people, times and places. Conservatives advocate for a literal interpretation of Islam.<sup>335</sup> Afshar (1999), Badran (1999), Wadud (1999) and Gole (1996) make it clear that reformist Islamist's progressive interpretation is problematic since they need to "manipulate complicated sets of loyalties and engage in complicated gender politics within the Islamist movement itself and vis-à-vis secularists" (Badran 1999, 177). In fact, the reformists in Jordan keep a very low profile.<sup>336</sup>

The reformists see a woman's participation in the public sphere as her duty, to contribute to the development of the Islamic community, as long as it does not interfere with her duties as a mother and wife.<sup>337</sup> Complementarity secular and Muslim feminists consider conservative Islamist feminists the mouthpiece of the Muslim Brotherhood, calling for a strict segregation

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<sup>334</sup> My findings corroborate Afshar's (1999) study on Iranian Islamist feminists.

<sup>335</sup> In Iran, Islamist and secular elite feminists are in the forefront demanding changes and improvements in women's lives (Afshar 1999). However, this is not the case in Jordan. The two groups are not allied. Each views the other with scepticism. Islamists perceive secular feminists as westoxicated, eroding the moral fibre of society and disrespecting Islamic-Arab-cultural values. Secularists on the other hand believe that Islamists will set women back and are propagandists.

<sup>336</sup> One member of the IAF admitted that Islamist feminists are engaging covertly in a progressive interpretation of the Qur'an. By admitting this fact, she is implying that men are not really watching out for women's interests as they claim, and the situation is less than idyllic.

<sup>337</sup> CMF share the reformists' ideology with regards to women's participation in the public sphere.

between the sexes and claiming that a woman's proper place is the home. Conservative Islamist feminists blame working women for all social ills, and claim women's remunerated work is harmful to family life and undermines the divinely ordained gender order. They are of the opinion that single working women evade their religious and Islamic social duty by postponing marriage.<sup>338</sup> Complementarity Islamist feminists want development and change strictly within the framework of Islam, incorporating western technology without its ideology. Progressive Islamists differ from the conservatives in that the former want to reconcile Islam with the needs of modern age. Both progressive and conservative Islamists see themselves as protectors of Islam and Islamic values.

In summary, Islamists base their discourse on a moral framework: preserving the moral purity of women and preventing the social disintegration of society with the *hijab* symbolising their faith and Islamic identity. They tend to idealize their lives because they are on the defensive<sup>339</sup> (Gole 1996). Islamist feminists did not strike me as well informed about the current debates of female Islamists in the region,<sup>340</sup> other than a recent decision in Egypt regarding a woman's right to divorce her husband (*khulwa*).<sup>341</sup>

The difference between CSF, CMF, and CIF rests with the emphasis each group places on the role of religion, how each group interprets Islam (flexible or rigid) and their perception of what

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<sup>338</sup> My findings are consistent with Stowasser's (1987a) earlier research.

<sup>339</sup> Islamists tend to promote an ideal image of Islam. Their discourse tends to be apologetic, because they feel that they are stigmatised: perceived as backwards by secular Jordanian women, the State and by the West. Scholars are divided regarding the dis/advantages of Islamist feminism, see for example Abu Lughod (2001); Afshar (1996a, 1999); Karam (1998); Moghadam (2001).

<sup>340</sup> This is contradictory to work by Afshar (1999) on Iranian Islamists and Gole (1996) on Turkish Islamists.

<sup>341</sup> JNCW spells this word as *khoulweh*, as noted in chapter four.

constitutes women's rights. All the participants and feminists interviewed lament the failure of feminists in Jordan to band together to promote women's issues.<sup>342</sup>

## CRITIQUING COMPLEMENTARY FEMINISM

It can be argued that CF traps women in the motherhood role, especially since women are aware of society's and Islam's veneration of motherhood. It is also possible that women seized the cultural/symbolic capital of motherhood and turned it into their source of social and personal power (Alund 1999; Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999). Or, as Bourdieu (1977) remarked, they made a virtue out of necessity. Motherhood in CF becomes the basis of women's self-worth. A major disadvantage is the exclusionary role Complementarity Feminism unwittingly assumes towards single and childless married women. It reproduces the prevailing social hierarchy where married women are greatly valued as wives/mothers for their love and self-sacrifice and single women are devalued and marginalized. Reverence for motherhood implicitly places married women with children on a pedestal, elevating their status to a saint/Madonna, which automatically demotes single women. The implicit devaluation of "singlehood"<sup>343</sup> is likely to cause a rift between single and married women, since each group lacks an understanding of the other's predicament. In turn this may minimise the prospects of solidarity in the future.

In addition, CF gives the impression that women need to be tolerant of men for the greater good of society. Due to women's socialisation in putting other's needs ahead of their own, some women may be led to believe that they should concede to unjust demands from their family. Because most women are taught that men and society revere, respect and honour women, some

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<sup>342</sup> Naqshabandi (1995, 103) states that the weakness of the Jordanian feminist movement can be attributed to the cumulative results of the interaction of social, political and historical forces. I concur with her viewpoint.

<sup>343</sup> Because CF is based on the premise that women will marry and reproduce, thus it fails to consider single women, whose numbers are gradually increasing.



may believe that if women are mistreated it is their fault. The danger of this view is that it implies that a woman who is being ill-treated is at fault, minimising the likelihood of the personal becoming political. CF assumes men are fair and fails to recognize the power of the social structure (GPD at the macro/micro level) in shaping gendered behaviour. Women separate out their daily-lived experiences from the concept of power and conflict; they depoliticise themselves by focusing solely on “sex role socialization”, emphasizing consensus, stability and conformity (Stacey and Thorne 1995, 369) while obscuring relations of dominance.

Another disadvantage of CF is that it naturalises women’s nurturing and assumes that women instinctively know how to handle and treat their husbands (or fathers and brothers). Most of the women believe that if the husband perpetually abuses his wife, then, and only then, is it considered to be his fault. Even though these women know about the various forms of abuse, they acknowledge only one form, beating, as the sole legitimate reason to consider the husband to be at fault. In this manner, CF fails to empower a woman who is experiencing “subtle” forms of abuse and discrimination. CF may be considered to be similar to “victim” feminism, in that women are led to believe that they are helpless, a victim of male power and “patriarchy” stripping away her agency (Oakley 1998, 45).

## CONCLUSION

Feminists, as well as married and single professional women, are attempting to define for themselves what it means to be a modern honourable Jordanian woman. The task is daunting. Both are grappling with the questions of how to adjust to change, and to what extent should they integrate western cultural values they admire with the cultural values they cherish.

Life is changing you know ... We are exposed to things and things are moving fast all around us and we're trying to be in



that league - in that cycle - and the mentality of the people here, especially the ones [who] are not exposed [to some of the changes]. ... So we are living like two lives at the same time. ... But if you look at our culture itself it's a good culture. It is based on - on love and respect you know, it is based on religion, the religion ... there's nothing wrong with that you know. There's a lot of discipline *ya'ni* - people fear God people are concerned about their neighbours, what they think of you ... that is something good that means people care you know. ... We have to ... take the best things [in our culture] and build on it (Fida).

I understand the changes that are taking place in our society and our lives. How we are going to keep this balance - to maintain this balance to remain Arabs and to take care of our traditions and feel that they coincide with our new lives because it's changed, we've changed - the world is changing. There are new things coming in, how we are going to mix the old with the things that are coming in from the West. And now we are going to - anyway I don't know - to me this is a dilemma I don't know if the Arab society is going to be able to reach a combination that brings the two together and maintain some things - The Japanese were able to - to a certain point and they combined the western influence but at the same time have maintained their culture and traditions. And they were able to succeed socially and economically to a certain point - they have problems but they were able to come up with a suitable combination. We as Arabs are still living this battle (Mayyada).

Living in a state of transition is taxing for professional elite Jordanian women (PEJW) and feminists alike since they need to manoeuvre strategically without jeopardising their honourable positioning and that of their family within society. I have attempted to illustrate that the women's movement and individual married and single PEJW have to navigate carefully through the web of competing discourses. Individual women are concerned about maintaining their honourable image, and it could be argued that the women's movement is concerned with maintaining its honourable status in society by emphasising the notion of complementarity and equity.

# CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSION

By elucidating PEJW's own accounts I have attempted to show how single and married PEJW manage the conventions of being an honourable woman as they navigate between their work and home environments. I have tried to point out that liberal-secular, conservative and Islamic/Islamist PEJW are influenced by the liberal-secular, conservative and Islamist discourses. Furthermore, each discourse attempts to assert the primacy of its notion of modernity, its brand of socio-politico-economic development, its ideals of social morality, and its conception of women's position in society. Consequently, the discourses place differing demands on PEJW. Women's stories point out the hidden factors shaping their decision-making and agentic action. These factors include the complex nature of familial dynamics and the strong bonds of connectivity, the role of religion and their personal interpretation of it, and the need to abide by the moral discourse of honour if they are to maintain their own and their families' honourable positioning in society.

A running theme throughout the chapters of the thesis is the importance for women of maintaining their honourable reputation since their social, emotional, and economic well-being is tied to their connectivity with their family. PEJW have a vested interest in protecting and upholding their honour. Honour is the symbolic capital. If they maintain their reputation, their

family's symbolic capital increases in the eyes of society. In return they ensure their family's support which constitutes their fall back position. This is one of the main reasons that women collude with men in disciplining women and applying sanctions to them, and why women are complicit in perpetuating the mythical image of the honourable woman. What is important is women's actual adherence to, and practice of, what they perceive to be honourable, since their observance of these notions enhances their respectability and honourable standing within their home and society, and enables them to use their symbolic capital as a bargaining chip.

Women's acceptance of and resistance to their honourable femininity is a source of conflict. For the majority of women, accepting the discourse of honour implies their collusion with familial and societal values and ceding their agency, whereas rejecting the discourse of honour means they are placing a strain on their familial bonds. The reader is made aware of the complex reality of PEJW's daily lives, the simultaneous interplay of multiple factors and women's need to balance the factors and study their options strategically before embarking on a course of action. The exemplars provided in chapters three, four and five are illustrative of some of the challenges women face within their personal and professional lives. They underscore the interconnectedness of the private sphere with the public sphere, the nature of familial, social, and state politics and the notion of men and women's honour. The linkage stresses that a woman's position as honourable is relational, depending on with whom she is interacting at the time. Her identity as an honourable woman is always under construction through the process of every day practices within the context she inhabits, which is itself undergoing change.

By looking at the day-to-day practices of women, a glimpse is provided of the complex interlocking structures of power in which they are embedded and that are changing over time. PEJW are caught in contradictory sets of power relations when their needs and values oppose

those of their parents and/or society. Both single and married professional women are breaking new ground therefore it is to be expected that they would experience personal and professional challenges and resistance. I identified women's areas of struggle and grounded their struggle within the limitations of their own material and ideological reality and a society that considers women as personifying honour. I showed that the women I interviewed are constantly pushing their limits to discern what they can and cannot do. What is considered socially acceptable is not clear at best. So, within their confined environments, women have to find out, through trial and error, their limits and what is considered to be honourable behaviour. I noted a lack of a standard definition regarding what constitutes the honourable Jordanian woman. The term is complex and means different things to different women. The notion of honour is elastic. It has to do with the way a woman conducts herself in everyday activity, from her choice of clothing to her body language in both the private and public domain. The notion of honour is tied to how others perceive her, their judgement of her and her family. Both family and society use honour to control women and to prevent them from exercising fully their agency. However, women have found creative tactics and strategies to mould the discourse of honour to serve their interests.

Women engage in various strategies when they act in their self-interest. For example they try to gain their parents' and/or husband's approval, by developing means of gaining their families' and/or husband's receptivity. They gradually pave the way by dropping hints, making brief remarks and necessary introductions here and there, so that by the time they announce their plan of action their family and/or husband are receptive rather than taken by surprise. I've referred to this strategy as preparing the ground. Or they employ a strategy of subterfuge. By using this approach, women avoid having to confront directly or challenge normative social values. They operate behind the backs of people since their personal safety and the success of their outcome is dependent on their secrecy. They don't consider themselves as lying; rather they are making

adjustments to accommodate the existing cultural norms. They conform to minimal standards of what constitutes honourable behaviour. I refer to this strategy as partial compliance. In situations where women appear to completely comply with their family's wishes, their practice does not mean that they are ignorant of the unjust acts towards them; it may simply reflect their survival mechanisms in situations where they are constrained. *Fait accompli* is an alternative strategy women enact. It can be thought of as a "done deal". It is similar to partial compliance, in that women follow through on their plan of action without raising any one's suspicions. The difference between *fait accompli* and partial compliance is that once the initial goal is attained, and women feel they are on safe ground, they will unveil the secret and inform their family and/or husband. This strategy was common among married women, whereas partial compliance was more common among single women. Women who undertake partial compliance and/or *fait accompli* eschew direct confrontation with their family and/or society. Their strategy of indirect and covert defiance of socio-cultural norms allows them to appear honourable, remain in good standing within society, have a good reputation, and maintain their bonds of connectivity with their family, without which they cannot survive. Their forms of resistance reflect their ingenuity, persistence and resilience, because these women are unwilling to lead a shadowy existence. The drawback to these acts of resistance is that through their circumspect behaviour women inadvertently perpetuate and reproduce the prevailing GPD and social norms.

Most of the single women created cover/overt alliances with their father and/or brother, and married women learned how to "wrap their husband around their little finger" by invoking various strategies. These strategies challenged the cultural practices that are socially and politically significant. In general women were pragmatic. When they acted, it was according to a calculated effort, sometimes guided by their intuition and faith. Women were aware of their limits, the invisible red lines, implying that their own gender ideology influenced their decision-

making, shaped their possibilities and limitations and predisposed them to take certain actions (Chowdhury, Nelson et al. 1994). However, structural issues such as the GPD within their home, work environment and society at large, their interpretations of religion, state laws, and the socio-economic-political milieu also played pivotal roles. My hope is that the structuring processes approach (Figures 2 and 3, Appendix B) will stimulate others to probe this process further so that a better understanding of the complex nature of the lives of women and men in Jordan as well as other Arab countries can be reached. Women's lives can be only understood when taking into consideration the complex relationship of these interrelated factors: women acting on structure and being acted upon (the processes shaping and reshaping them), and the manner in which they interact.

I have tried to sketch a schematic representation of women's strategic actions (Figure 5, Appendix F). Women's actions underscore the point that because women's habitus is honour, they are guided to act honourably. Their need to maintain their connectivity with their family, abide by socio-religious injunctions, and protect their family's honour has led PEJW to appear as if they are acting in accordance with the discourse of honour. By acting strategically (complete compliance, partial compliance or *fait accompli*), women achieve their goals while protecting their honour and connectivity. Thus, women are involved in propagating the discourse of honour. Both genders subscribe to it for different reasons. Men defend it because their honour is linked to their female kin's behaviour. Women preserve it because their family is their lifeline. In a society that values kinship ties, where individuals derive their identity and social status from their family, and considers honour a symbolic capital, women cannot afford to disregard honour. PEJW stretched the boundaries of honour, rendering it malleable in their attempt to maintain their honourable reputation and social status. Through their various strategies PEJW engaged in a dialectical relationship between their agentic selves and their social structures.

It is too early to determine whether the rise in single women as a social category will undermine the prevailing GPD. However, women who have supportive fathers, brothers as well as husbands stand a good chance. As one woman said

Without the support of the Jordanian man – the woman would not have reached anywhere. If it weren't for my dad's support and my brother helping me through -- I would not have gotten anywhere. The Jordanian man's role is forgotten – it is invisible – he is known for his oppressiveness and brutality. But there are situations where the woman has reached high positions because of the man. ... [Also] you'll find out that the man is being strangled more than women. He has just as many constraints as the woman does. So it is important to see the role of the man in supporting the woman. The father has the pivotal role in the woman's life (Diyala).

Women's belief in the notion of complementarity should not be ignored since it underscores their understanding of gender relations.

Within their professional career, I have attempted to illustrate the levels of resistance and the hidden power structures that women face as they assert themselves and define their honourability. When the women stood up for their rights, asserted their opinions and challenged male authority at work, they were labelled as troublemakers. Some people went as far as stigmatising them as *mu'aqqada*, meaning they were neurotic and suffered from a complex, using this as a means of silencing them.

Women are aware that their reputation at work is not exclusively based on their professional conduct. Their family's reputation as well as their personal/moral characteristics are intertwined. Their personal and professional lives are enmeshed. Many of the women live in fear that someone will blemish their reputation. As one participant said, "You live in fear for your reputation. ... Reputation controls your life through space and time."



Women's resistance is indicative of their need to reconcile between who they want to be and who they are expected to be. The women I interviewed are struggling to define for themselves what it means to be an honourable woman, what constitutes morality and ethics, and to identify those structures that bind them. Moreover, they are questioning the values of the structures that are imposed on them.

I have noted their internal struggle as they try to construct their own standards and values without jeopardizing their honourable positioning within a milieu rife with contradictory social values and norms, Islamic revivalist ethics, Arab-Islamic heritage, and western ideologies. These women are grappling with concepts such as freedom and individuality, i.e. what does it mean to be an agent within the context of connectivity, where their subjectivity is based on that of their extended family. This struggle is especially poignant for single young women who want to "fit" into society, to be recognised as adults and independent individuals. Many of the single and married women I interviewed are daughters of parents who were/are the founding fathers/mothers of Jordan. They are proud of their Arab heritage and Jordanian identity. Many are asking, "Who is the modern Jordanian?" a relevant question to both Jordanian women and those of Palestinian origin. Irrespective of their origin, these women are questioning the social norms and the emphasis on their honourable womanhood.

There is no single prototype of the PEJW. The modern Jordanian professional woman is the product of two worlds – steeped in cultural tradition of Arab-Islamic heritage as well as that of the modern world by her educational indoctrination, exposure to western media, and for some, travel. PEJW embody both modernity and tradition. They are bridging the past and future, as "active mediators" of both categories.<sup>344</sup> They are caught in the process of constructing their

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<sup>344</sup> I have appropriated this thought from Layne 1994, 153 in her description of the Hashemites.



identities as they challenge and question the cultural norms and sanctified practices, and in the process construct their own version of the honourable professional Jordanian woman, even for those who resist the notion of the honour as a symbolic capital. A woman's honourable positioning guides her to act in such a manner as to maintain her good reputation. To do otherwise means she risks her own and her family's social ruin.

What has been learned is that is that when examining PEJW's agencies, connectivity to family, natal and extended, remains a powerful influence that deserves further study at discrete intervals. Also, PEJW women walk a tight rope in their attempt to maintain their personal autonomy and connectivity with their family. They engage in a double resistance when they fight their families and the discourse of honour. Other issues that were uncovered are that PEJW have a misconception of the Jordanian male, whom they refer to as the eastern man, *rajul sharqi*, and that the subject of sex is taboo, shrouded in secrecy and misconceptions, and a source of anxiety for many women. Also, although daughters refuse to be complicit partners in their mother's reproduction of GPD, most PEJW consider their fathers to be their backbone, women's education and career did not provide them with the autonomy they desire, and veiled women are discriminated against at work.

The importance of my study is to alert policy makers and planners about the dilemmas and difficulties JEPW face within their personal and professional lives. I hope that this study will open the door to social debates regarding women's right to exercise their agency on their own terms, and to question the notion of women's hymenization and social assumptions that veiled professional women are less intelligent than secularly dressed women, and that locally educated women are less professional than western educated women. Lastly, I hope that this study will increase society's appreciation of dilemmas PEJW face, and encourage further research in this

area. A question that I would like to raise for further research is “how can Jordanian women develop a healthy attitude towards their own sexuality, if feminine sexual desire is silenced or associated with rampant sexual behaviour?”

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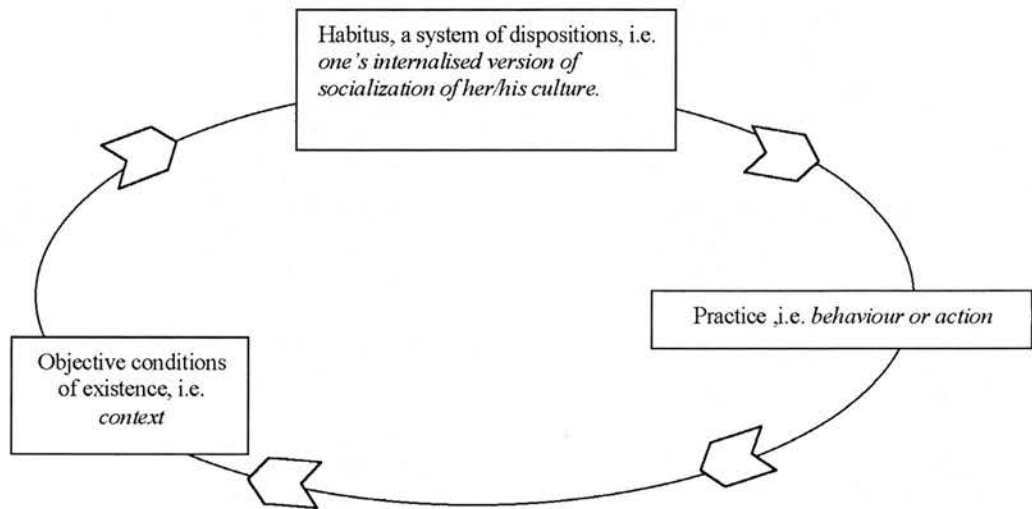
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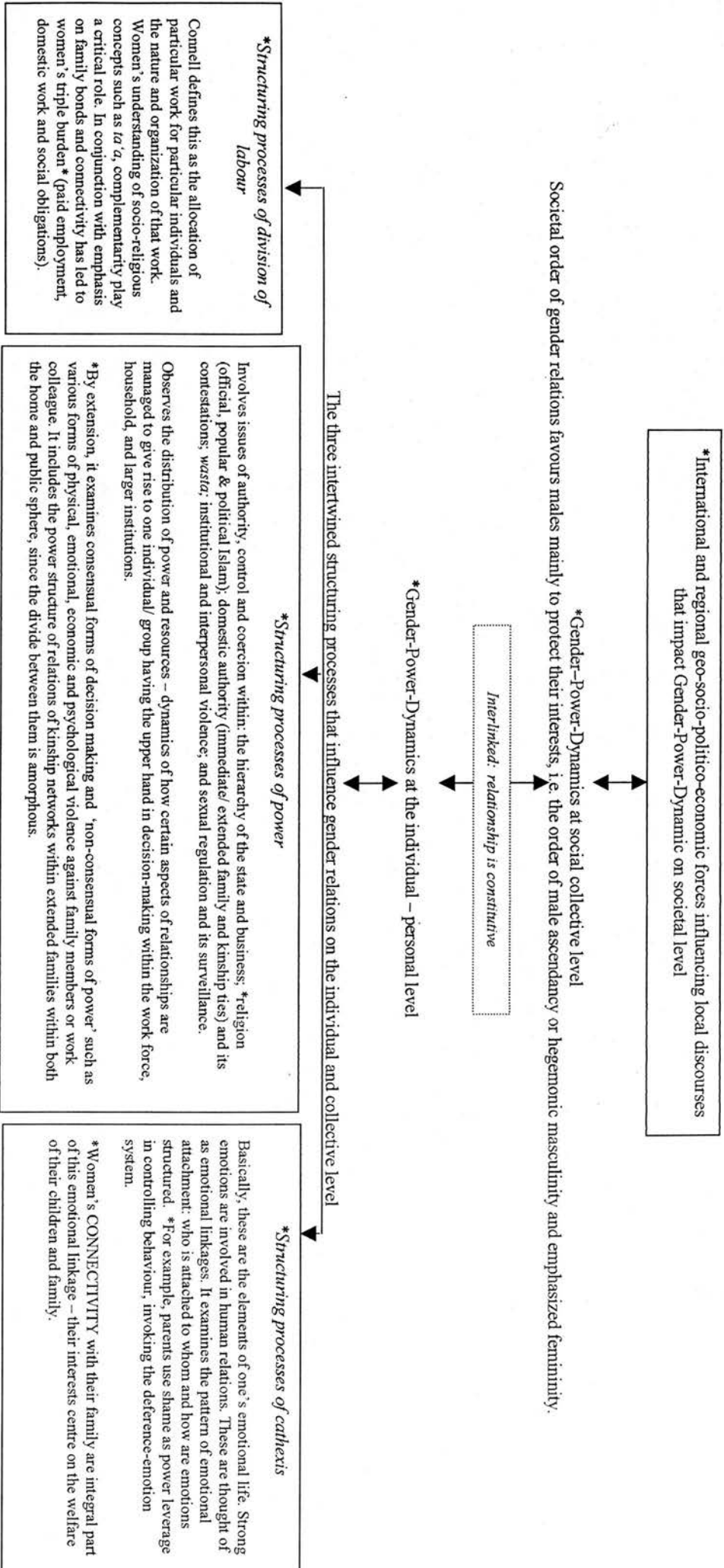


Appendix A  
Figure 1 - Habitus, Practice And Conditions Of Existence

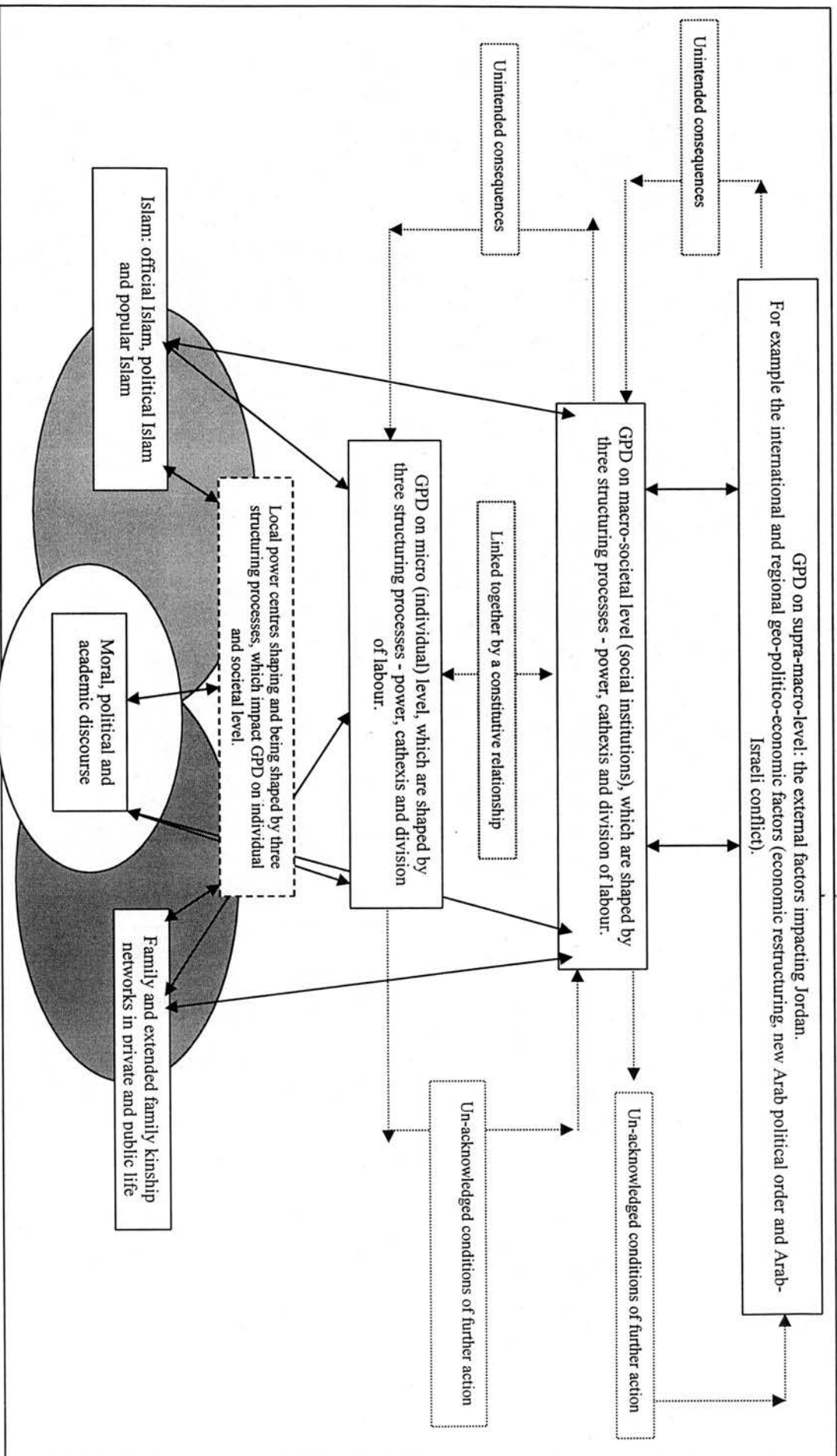


The diagram encapsulates the circularity of the process, whereby habitus, practice and objective conditions of existence produce and reproduce one another as well as the process. One and/or all elements reproduce and collude with the process, ensuring and maintaining its continuity and reproduction. Bourdieu refers to this as circular circularity.

Appendix B  
Figure 2 - Structuring Processes Influencing GPD On The Individual And Societal Level.  
(An Adaptation Of Connell's Theory)\*



Appendix B Figure 3 – Structuring Processes Approach<sup>1</sup>



## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE – SINGLE WOMEN

#### INTRODUCTION:

Thank you for participating in my study. The purpose of my study is to learn how women assert themselves in their private and public lives. I will be interviewing both single and married women western and non-western educated i.e. studied in Jordan or in the Arab World, who graduated between 1988-1998.

The interview will range between one to two hours. Since my research is qualitative, I will need to conduct a minimum of two interviews.

Your answers are strictly confidential. For research purposes and confidentiality, I would like to ask you to give me a pseudo-name as well a psuedo-profession. Please state your pseudo-name \_\_\_\_\_ and profession \_\_\_\_\_.

For accuracy of information, I would like to tape our interview if this is acceptable to you. Feel free to shut off the tape recorder at any time. Here is the button.

If you would like a copy of our interview, I will be more than happy to provide you with one. Again, I would like to thank you for your time and effort.<sup>345</sup>

#### EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

I am interested to know something about your educational background.

##### 1. WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL?

- Undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate studies? (your age\_\_\_\_, degree obtained\_\_\_\_, and year graduated\_\_\_\_).

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<sup>345</sup> The question is typed in bold. The subsets of questions that are preceded by bullets are my probes to remind me to focus on certain issues if the participant did not raise them herself. Italicized questions which begin with an \* are those that I added after I wrote up my initial questionnaire. They reflect issues the participants raised during the interview process. Anything that is ~~strikethrough~~ are words or questions that I deleted.

- What did you specialise in?
- 2. WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO STUDY IN THE WEST / JORDAN OR THE ARAB WORLD?
  - Did you get a scholarship? Or did your father or somebody else in your family support you?
- 3. WHO ENCOURAGED YOU TO PURSUE YOUR STUDIES?
  - Where your parents supportive of your university study?

#### LIFE AFTER GRADUATION FROM UNIVERSITY

- 4. AFTER GRADUATION, WHAT DID YOU DO?
  - [If western educated] when you returned to Jordan, what was your experience like?

#### FAMILY BACKGROUND:

- 5. HOW MANY BROTHERS AND SISTERS DO YOU HAVE?
  - Where do you rank? Are you the oldest, middle, or youngest?
- 6. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BROTHER?
  - Is he supportive?
  - Does he ever interfere in your personal life?
- 7. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SISTERS?
- 8. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FATHER?
  - To what extent do you share your daily experiences with him?
  - To what extent do you share your feelings with him?
  - Does he have particular expectations of you as his daughter?

- Does he help you out if you need to go to official agencies?
9. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR WITH YOUR MOTHER?
- To what extent do you share your daily experiences with her?
  - To what extent do you share your feelings with her?
  - Does she mediate on your behalf with your father?
  - Is she understanding of your individual needs as a professional woman?
  - Does she have particular expectations of you as her daughter?

STATUS AS A SINGLE WOMAN:

10. YOUR STATUS AS A SINGLE WOMAN, IS THIS BY CHOICE OR DID THIS JUST HAPPEN TO BE? [if deliberate]
- Why did you choose to remain single?
11. I'M CURIOUS TO KNOW WHETHER YOUR PARENTS WERE APPROACHED BY POTENTIAL SUITORS? [if yes]
- What was their response?
  - Where you in the house at the time?
  - Where you expected to serve refreshments?
  - Where you expected to converse with them?
  - How did you feel about the whole situation?
12. SINCE YOU ARE SINGLE, DO YOU FEEL PRESSURED TO GET MARRIED? [If yes]
- When did you start feeling pressure?

13. DO YOUR PARENTS PRESSURE YOU TO GET MARRIED? [If yes]
- When did they start? How old were you?
  - What is your response to them?
14. WHAT IS IT LIKE BEING A SINGLE WOMAN IN JORDAN?
- How does society perceive you?
  - Are you expected to be available whenever your family needs you?
  - Do you have freedom of movement?
  - Do you have freedom to choose your friends?
  - Do you have freedom over your income?
15. WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN TO YOU?
16. AS A SINGLE WOMAN, DO YOU LIVE WITH YOUR PARENTS?
- If you had a choice to move out and live on your own, would you? [if yes or no, ask] why?

**[If she lives on her own, then ask]**

- How did your living arrangement come about?
  - How has your living arrangement affected your relationship with her family?
17. DESCRIBE WHAT IT IS LIKE LIVING WITH YOUR PARENTS?
- How do you resolve your differences and disputes?
  - Do you feel you can be independent while still living with them?
  - Can you entertain and have your friends? How often?



- How do you negotiate your needs?
  - Does your family respect your privacy? And do they respect your leisure time?
  - [If she does not mention anything about her need for privacy, then ask] What does privacy mean to you?
  - *\*When family and/or family friends come to visit, are you expected to join your family?*
18. HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR FREE TIME?
19. *\*WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR LIFE WOULD BE LIKE IF YOU REACH 40 AND YOU ARE STILL NOT MARRIED?*

### SENSE OF SELF:

A lot of emphasis is placed on the way one looks.

20. HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU DEVOTE FOR YOUR GROOMING? IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO KEEP YOUR FIGURE? [IF SHE SAYS YES]
- What do you do?

[If she is veiled, ask]

21. WHAT DOES THE VEIL MEAN TO YOU?
- When did you start wearing the veil and why?
  - Does anyone in your family veil? What was their reaction when you veiled?
  - *\*As a veiled woman do you have moments when you would like to show off your femininity? [If yes] How do you?*

### INTIMATE LIFE:

22. DO YOU HAVE A BOYFRIEND? [If yes]
- How did you meet?

- Describe your relationship?
23. GIVEN THE CULTURAL NORMS IS IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO GO OUT OFTEN AND SPEND TIME ALONE WITH YOUR BOYFRIEND?
- Do your parents know about your boyfriend? [If no] Why not?
  - Do your siblings know about your boyfriend? [If no] Why not?
  - How much have you shared with them about your relationship?
  - How have they responded?
24. IT IS NORMAL TO WANT TO BE HUGGED AND KISSED. HOW ARE YOUR NEEDS MET?
25. WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS YOUR IDEAL HUSBAND SHOULD HAVE?
- Do you have a preference regarding the nationality of your future partner or current boyfriend?
26. I'VE HEARD THAT THERE IS A SPECIAL CLAUSE WITHIN THE ISLAMIC MARRIAGE CONTRACT. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IT?
27. A GREAT DEAL OF EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON A SINGLE WOMAN'S REPUTATION, HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOU?
- *\*What does it mean to you to have a "good" reputation?*
28. IS VIOLENCE AGAINST A WOMAN EVER JUSTIFIED?

#### HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES:

29. HOW DO YOU BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND FAMILY LIFE?
- Do you have a live in maid or part time maid?
  - What is your household responsibility?

- Whose decision was it that you had this share of responsibility?

[If she has a maid ask:]

30. WHAT ARE HER RESPONSIBILITIES?

- Who is responsible to train her? (If applicable) How many hours did it take you to train her?
- How often do you have to change your help?
- What language do you communicate in?
- On the days that your maid is off, who does what in the house?

[If she doesn't have a maid ask:]

31. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HOUSEHOLD CHORES? WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

32. HOW OFTEN DO YOU ENTERTAIN?

- Is it formal or informal? Are they with friends or family or work colleagues?
- How often do friends and family drop in?
- Who helps you with entertaining?
- Who does the shopping? And cooking?

FAMILY OBLIGATIONS:

33. HOW OFTEN DO YOU SEE YOUR FAMILY? (GRANDPARENTS, AUNT, UNCLES AND COUSINS?)

[if she lives on her own]

- How often do you see your parents?

- How would you describe your relationship with your extended family?
  - How often do you visit them? Is it by choice or are you pressured to visit them?
34. HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME ON YOUR WEEKEND?
- Are you obliged to spend it with your parents or grandparents?
  - Who plans the family outings?
  - Is it possible for you to have your own independent plans? How often can you do this?

#### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:

35. WHEN YOU GET YOUR MONTHLY SALARY WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT?
- Do you have control over it? Is it partial or complete control?
  - Do you hand it over to your parents? Is this willingly or are you forced to?
  - Do your parents interfere and tell you what to do with your money?
36. WHAT DO YOU SPEND YOUR INCOME ON?
- Are you expected to contribute towards the household expenses? [If yes]
  - How much? What is your share compared to the other members of your family?
  - How much do you leave for yourself? How much do you save?
37. DO YOU HAVE YOUR OWN SAVINGS ACCOUNT?
- Do your parents know about this account? OR is it secretive?
38. DO YOU OWN ANY PROPERTY IN YOUR NAME?
- [If yes] what? And who manages it?

39. WHAT INCOME GROUP WOULD YOU DEFINE YOURSELF BELONGING TO? DOES THIS INCLUDE YOUR SOLE INCOME OR IS IT BASED ON YOUR FATHER'S?
40. WHAT PLANS HAVE YOU MADE TOWARDS YOUR RETIREMENT?
41. *\*HOW DO YOU FILE FOR INCOME TAX?*

#### PROFESSIONAL CAREER:

42. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN AT THIS JOB? WHAT OTHER JOBS HAVE YOU HAD?
- Why did you change jobs?
43. AS A PROFESSIONAL WOMAN, WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGES?
- What is it like being a female professional in a male dominated world?
  - Do you feel that you have to be careful in the way you interact with men?
  - What about men who are in your age? Do you feel that you have to be careful in the way you interact with them?
  - Do you have to dress conservatively for work?
  - Do you have any problems completing your work?
  - Does your work life spill over into your home life?
44. COULD YOUR JOB INVOLVE TRAVEL?
- [If yes] Is it within the country or abroad? What is your normal response?
  - What is your family's response?
  - Would you have to seek your parents permission?
  - Would you be able to inform them of your plans and go?

45. AS AN [WESTERN] EDUCATED PROFESSIONAL WOMAN, HOW DO OTHER PROFESSIONALS, BOTH MALES AND FEMALES, PERCEIVE YOU?
- Do they take you seriously?
  - Are there times when you have to be assertive and take a firm stand? How do you think your colleagues at work judge you?
  - [If western educated] Do you think that the fact you lived in the West influences how you are perceived?
46. WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF WESTERN PROFESSIONAL WOMEN?
47. HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON THE JOB?
48. WHAT ARE YOUR PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS? AND YOUR FUTURE GOALS?
49. HOW DO YOUR PARENTS AND SIBLINGS REACT TO THE FACT THAT YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL WOMAN?
50. REFLECTING ON YOUR LIFE, DO YOU FEEL THAT HAVING AN EDUCATION AND A CAREER HAS EMPOWERED YOU?
- [If yes] in what way?
  - [If no] why not?
51. DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE CONTROL OVER YOUR LIFE?
- [If no] why not?
  - [If yes] in what way?
52. DO YOU HAVE ANY ROLE MODELS?
- Do you have any western role models?
  - Do you have any Arab role models?
  - Is one more influential than the other?

53. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF TOUJAN FEISAL?

- *\*What aspects of her personality do you like? And why?*
- *\*What aspects do you dislike? And why?*
- *\*Do you feel that she represents you in parliament? And why?*

54. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF SENATOR LEILA SHARAF?

55. *\*WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT?*

56. DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS AN ARAB WOMAN?

- [If yes] What does it mean to you to be an Arab woman?

57. I HAVE HEARD SOME PEOPLE REFER TO THIS CULTURE AS BACKWARD. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What aspects do you find as backwards?
- How do you define backwards?

58. *\*MANY WOMEN HAVE MENTIONED THAT A LOT OF EMPHASIS IS PLACE ON THEIR REPUTATION AND THEIR FAMILY'S REPUTATION. WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE?*

- *\*What does having a "good" reputation mean to you?*

59. IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD OR TALK ABOUT?

Thank you for your time.



## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW GUIDE— MARRIED WOMEN

#### INTRODUCTION:

Thank you for participating in my study. The purpose of my study is to learn how women assert themselves in their private and public lives. I will be interviewing both single and married women western and non-western educated i.e. studied in Jordan or in the Arab World, who graduated between 1988-1998.

The interview will range between one to two hours. Since my research is qualitative, I will need to conduct a minimum of two interviews.

Your answers are strictly confidential. For research purposes and confidentiality, I would like to ask you to give me a pseudo-name as well as a pseudo-profession. Please state your pseudo-name \_\_\_\_\_ and profession \_\_\_\_\_.

For accuracy of information, I would like to tape our interview if this is acceptable to you. Feel free to shut off the tape recorder at any time. Here is the button.

If you would like a copy of our interview, I will be more than happy to provide you with one. Again, I would like to thank you for your time and effort.<sup>346</sup>

#### EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

I am interested to know something about your educational background.

##### 1. WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL?

- Undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate studies? (your age\_\_\_\_, degree obtained\_\_\_\_, and year graduated\_\_\_\_).

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<sup>346</sup> The question is typed in bold. The subsets of questions that are preceded by bullets are my probes to remind me to focus on certain issues if the participant did not raise them herself. Italicized questions which begin with an \* are those that I added after I wrote up my initial questionnaire. They reflect issues the participants raised during the interview process. Anything that is ~~struckthrough~~ are words or questions that I deleted.

- What did you specialise in?
2. WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO STUDY IN THE WEST / JORDAN OR THE ARAB WORLD?
- Did you get a scholarship? Or did your father or somebody else in your family support you?
3. WHO ENCOURAGED YOU TO PURSUE YOUR STUDIES?
- Where your parents supportive of your university study?
  - [If she was married] and was your husband supportive of your university study?

#### LIFE AFTER GRADUATION FROM UNIVERSITY

4. AFTER GRADUATION, WHAT DID YOU DO?
- [If western educated] when you returned to Jordan, what was your experience like?

#### FAMILY BACKGROUND:

5. HOW MANY BROTHERS AND SISTERS DO YOU HAVE?
- Where do you rank? Are you the oldest, middle, or youngest?
6. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BROTHER?
- Is he supportive?
  - Does he ever interfere in your personal life?
7. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SISTERS?
8. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FATHER?
- To what extent do you share your daily experiences with him?
  - To what extent do you share your feelings with him?

- Does he have particular expectations of you as his daughter?
- Does he help you out if you need to go to official agencies?

9. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR WITH YOUR MOTHER?

- To what extent do you share your daily experiences with her?
- To what extent do you share your feelings with her?
- Does she mediate on your behalf with your father?
- Is she understanding of your individual needs as a professional woman?
- Does she have particular expectations of you as her daughter?

CONJUGAL RELATIONSHIP:

10. HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR HUSBAND?

- [If arranged] Who introduced you to him? Where did you meet? Where you a students? Or were you working then?
- [If based on love] *Where did you meet? Was it in Jordan or out of the country?* Where you a students? Or were you working then?

11. IS YOUR HUSBAND A RELATIVE?

12. HOW LONG DID YOU KNOW YOUR HUSBAND BEFORE YOU GOT MARRIED?  
DESCRIBE YOUR COURTSHIP TIME?

13. WHAT STIPULATIONS DID YOU INCLUDE IN YOUR MARRIAGE CONTRACT?

- Who decided what conditions you should include?

**[If she was not working before she got married then ask:]**

14. WHAT WAS YOUR HUSBAND'S REACTION WHEN YOU SHARED WITH HIM YOUR DESIRE TO WORK?

**[If she was working before they got married then ask her:]**

15. DID YOUR HUSBAND EXPECT YOU TO STOP WORKING AFTER YOU GOT MARRIED? OR AFTER HAVING CHILDREN?

16. DID YOUR HUSBAND STUDY ABROAD? [if yes]

- Do you think that his exposure to western culture had an impact on your relationship?
- [if yes] please elaborate.

#### CHILD CARE RESPONSIBILITIES:

17. How many children do you have?

- How many sons and daughters?
- How old are they?
- [If they are school age] Do they go to (private or public) school? What grades?
- [If they are adults] Do they live at home? Do they work or are they students at the university?

18. HOW DO YOU ADJUST YOUR WORK SCHEDULE TO MEET YOUR CHILDREN'S NEEDS?

- Who gets them ready in the morning?
- How do they get to school?
- Does anyone make them school lunches?
- What time do they get home?
- Who else is home at that time?

- Do you eat your main meal with them?
- Does anyone help them with their homework?
- During mid term and final exams what is your schedule like?
- Whose decision was it to send your kids to private / public school?
- When your children need to be disciplined, who does it?
- When your children are sick, who takes care of them?

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDREN:

19. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR DAUGHTER(S)?
20. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SON(S)?

#### RELATIONSHIP OF SIBLINGS

21. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR DAUGHTER?
  - Does your son ever try to tell your daughter what to do? What to wear? Where to go and with whom?
22. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR DAUGHTER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SON?
23. WHAT DO YOU WISH FOR YOUR CHILDREN IN THE FUTURE?

#### HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES:

24. HOW DO YOU BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND FAMILY LIFE?
  - Do you have a live in maid or part time maid?

- Does your husband help? What does he do? How often? Do you and your husband have an agreed plan for household responsibilities?
- Who else helps with the children?

**[If she has a maid ask:]**

25. WHAT ARE HER RESPONSIBILITIES?

- How many hours did it take you to train her?
- What language do you communicate in?
- How often do you have to change your help?
- On the days that your maid is off, who helps you? What do they do?

26. HOW OFTEN DO YOU ENTERTAIN?

- Is it formal or informal? Are they with friends or family or work colleagues?
- How often do friends and family drop in?

27. WHO HELPS YOU WITH ENTERTAINING?

- Who does the shopping? And the cooking?

28. HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME ON YOUR DAYS OFF?

- What days is your weekend? Is it a Thursday afternoon and Friday or is it Friday and Saturday? How about your husband? And children?
- What do you usually do?
- [if her children and / or husband have different days off] How do you spend those days? What do you do? What do they do?
- Who plans the family outings? Are there places where they like to go? (Assess whether they can afford to go out and do things?)

- When your children have homework or on days when they have exams do you stay home?

#### FAMILY OBLIGATIONS:

29. HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT YOUR FAMILY? AND YOUR IN-LAWS?

- Do they live close by?
- How often do you call them?

30. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR IN-LAWS?

- Are you on good terms?
- Do you help them out? How often?
- How often do they help you out?
- When your mother in-law or father in-law is ill, do you go over to take care of them, or does their daughter?

31. DESCRIBE YOUR HUSBAND'S RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARENTS?

#### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:

32. WHAT DO YOU SPEND YOUR INCOME ON? WHAT DOES YOUR HUSBAND SPEND HIS INCOME ON?

- Who is responsible to decided the financial arrangements?

33. DO YOU HAVE A SEPARATE SAVINGS ACCOUNT?

- Approximately what percentage do you contribute?

34. DO YOU HAVE A JOINT BANK ACCOUNT WITH YOUR HUSBAND?
35. DO YOU OWN ANY PROPERTY IN YOUR NAME? [IF YES] WHO MANAGES IT?
36. WHAT INCOME GROUP WOULD YOU DEFINE YOURSELF BELONGING TO? IS IT BASED ON YOUR OWN INCOME, OR IS IT BASED ON YOUR COMBINED INCOME WITH YOUR HUSBAND?
37. WHAT PLANS HAVE YOU MADE TOWARDS YOUR RETIREMENT?
38. \*HOW DO YOU FILE FOR YOUR INCOME TAX?

#### INTIMACY RELATIONSHIP WITH SPOUSE:

39. WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS YOUR IDEAL HUSBAND SHOULD HAVE?
40. DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR HUSBAND?
- How would you describe the kind of emotional support you receive from your husband? Do you share your work experiences with him? Do you talk about your children's concerns?
  - Is it easy to confide in your husband when troubled?
  - [if her husband is not supportive] Who do you turn to in moments of need?
  - Do you have the freedom to travel and pursue your interests without restrictions or interference?



41. AS A COUPLE HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND SPEND ALONE, WITHOUT THE KIDS, EXTENDED FAMILY AND FRIENDS?
42. HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR MARRIAGE? USING A RATING SCALE OF 1-5 WHERE 1= VERY DISSATISFIED (OVER 75% OF YOUR TIME); 2= MODERATE DISSATISFIED (50-75% OF TIME); 3= FAIRLY EQUAL (APPROX 50-50%); 4= MODERATELY SATISFIED (50-75%), AND 5= VERY SATISFIED (OVER 75%)
43. HOW DO YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND SOLVE MARITAL DISPUTES?
- Are you able to discuss it with him calmly?
  - Does it escalate into a war of words?
  - Do you seek advice from your friends?
  - Do your parents or in-laws interfere?
44. IN PREPARATION OF YOUR MARITAL LIFE, WHAT ADVICE DID YOUR MOTHER GIVE YOU?
45. WHAT ADVICE DID YOUR MOTHER GIVE YOU WITH REGARDS TO YOUR WEDDING NIGHT?
- Many women have complained that their husbands were too impatient with them on their wedding night, i.e. they were eager to have sex rather than making love. Some have gone so far to say that they felt as if they were raped. What was your experience?
- ~~46. DID YOUR HUSBAND EVER FORCE YOU TO HAVE SEX?~~
46. IS MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST A WOMAN EVER JUSTIFIED?
47. WHAT SPACE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOURSELF, WITHIN YOUR MARRIAGE?
- Do you have time for yourself?

## PROFESSIONAL CAREER:

48. HOW LONG HAVE BEEN AT THIS JOB? WHAT OTHER JOBS HAVE YOU HAD?

- Why did you change jobs?

49. AS A PROFESSIONAL WOMAN, WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGES?

- What is it like being a female professional in a male dominated world?
- Do you feel that you have to be careful in the way you interact with men?
- What about men who are in your age? Do you feel that you have to be careful in the way you interact with them?
- Do you have to dress conservatively for work?
- Do you have any problems completing your work?
- Does your work life spill over into your home life?
- Could your job involve travel?
- [If yes] Is it within the country or abroad? What is your normal response? How does your husband respond?

50. AS AN [WESTERN] EDUCATED PROFESSIONAL WOMAN, HOW DO OTHER PROFESSIONALS, BOTH MALES AND FEMALES, PERCEIVE YOU?

- Do they take you seriously?
- Are there times when you have to be assertive and take a firm stand? How do you think your colleagues at work judge you?
- [If western educated] Do you think that the fact you lived in the West influence how you are perceived?

51. WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF WESTERN PROFESSIONAL WOMEN?
52. HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON THE JOB?
53. WHAT ARE YOUR PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS? YOUR FUTURE GOALS?
54. HOW DOES YOUR HUSBAND RESPOND TO THE FACT THAT YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL WOMAN? AND HOW DO YOUR PARENTS AND IN-LAWS RESPOND?

#### SENSE OF SELF:

A lot of emphasis is placed on the way one looks.

55. HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU DEVOTE FOR YOUR GROOMING? IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU TO KEEP YOUR FIGURE? [IF SHE SAYS YES]

- What do you do?

#### [If she is veiled, ask]

56. WHAT DOES THE VEIL MEAN TO YOU?

- When did you start wearing the veil and why?
- Does anyone in your family veil? What was their (natal and conjugal family) reaction when you veiled?
- *\*As a veiled woman do you have moments when you would like to show off your femininity? [If yes] How do you?*

57. REFLECTING ON YOUR LIFE, DO YOU FEEL THAT HAVING AN EDUCATION AND A CAREER HAS EMPOWERED YOU?

- [If yes] in what way?
- [If no] why not?

58. DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE CONTROL OVER YOUR LIFE?
- [If yes] in what way?
  - [If no] why not?
59. DO YOU HAVE ANY ROLE MODELS?
- Do you have any western role models?
  - Do you have any Arab role models?
  - Is one more influential than the other?
60. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF TOUJAN FEISAL?
- *\*What aspects of her personality do you like? And why?*
  - *\*What aspects do you dislike? And why?*
  - *\*Do you feel that she represents you in parliament? And why?*
61. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF SENATOR LEILA SHARAF?
62. *\*WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT?*
63. DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS AN ARAB WOMAN?
- [If yes] What does it mean to you to be an Arab woman?
64. I HAVE HEARD SOME PEOPLE REFER TO THIS CULTURE AS BACKWARD. WHAT DO YOU THINK?
- What aspects do you find as backwards?
  - How do you define backwards?

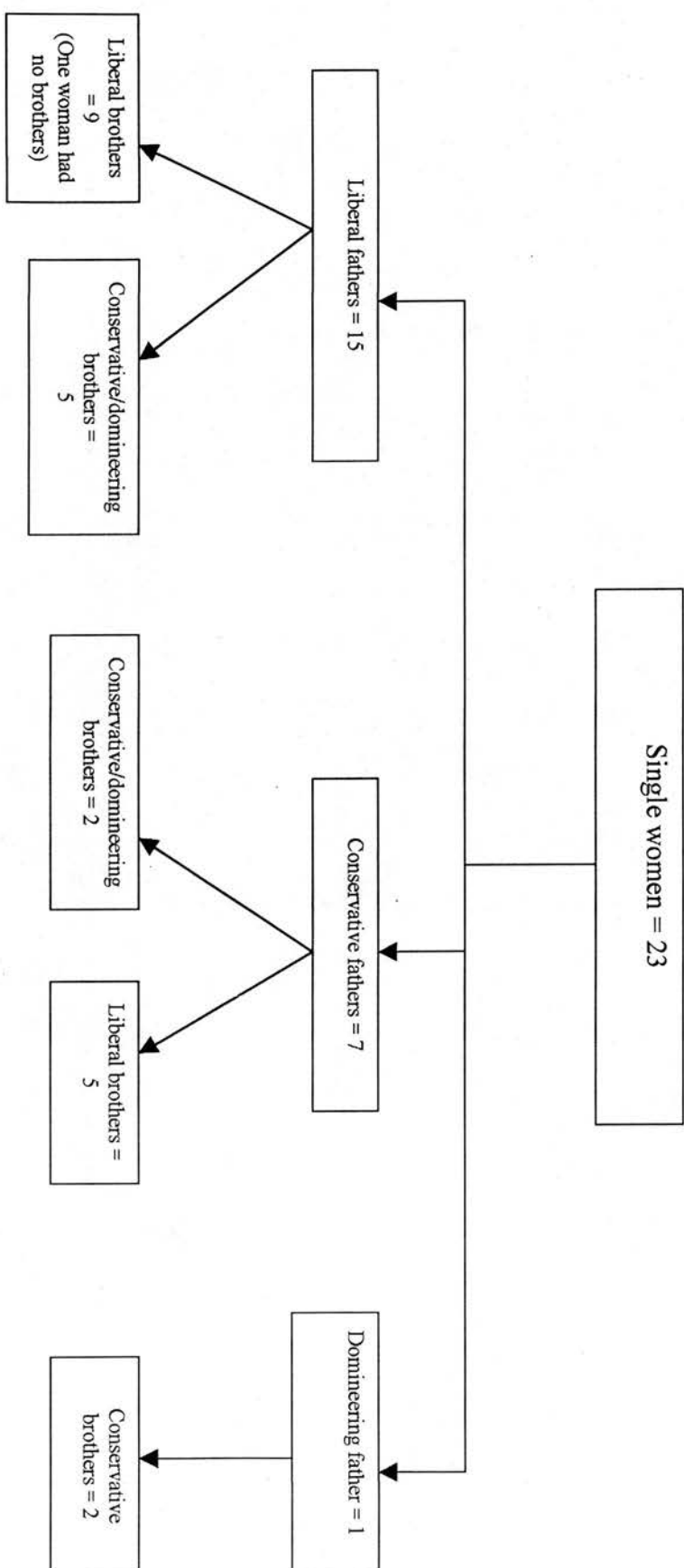
65. *\*MANY WOMEN HAVE MENTIONED THAT A LOT OF EMPHASIS IS PLACE ON THEIR REPUTATION AND THEIR FAMILY'S REPUTATION. WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE?*

- \*What does having a “good” reputation mean to you?

66. IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD OR TALK ABOUT?

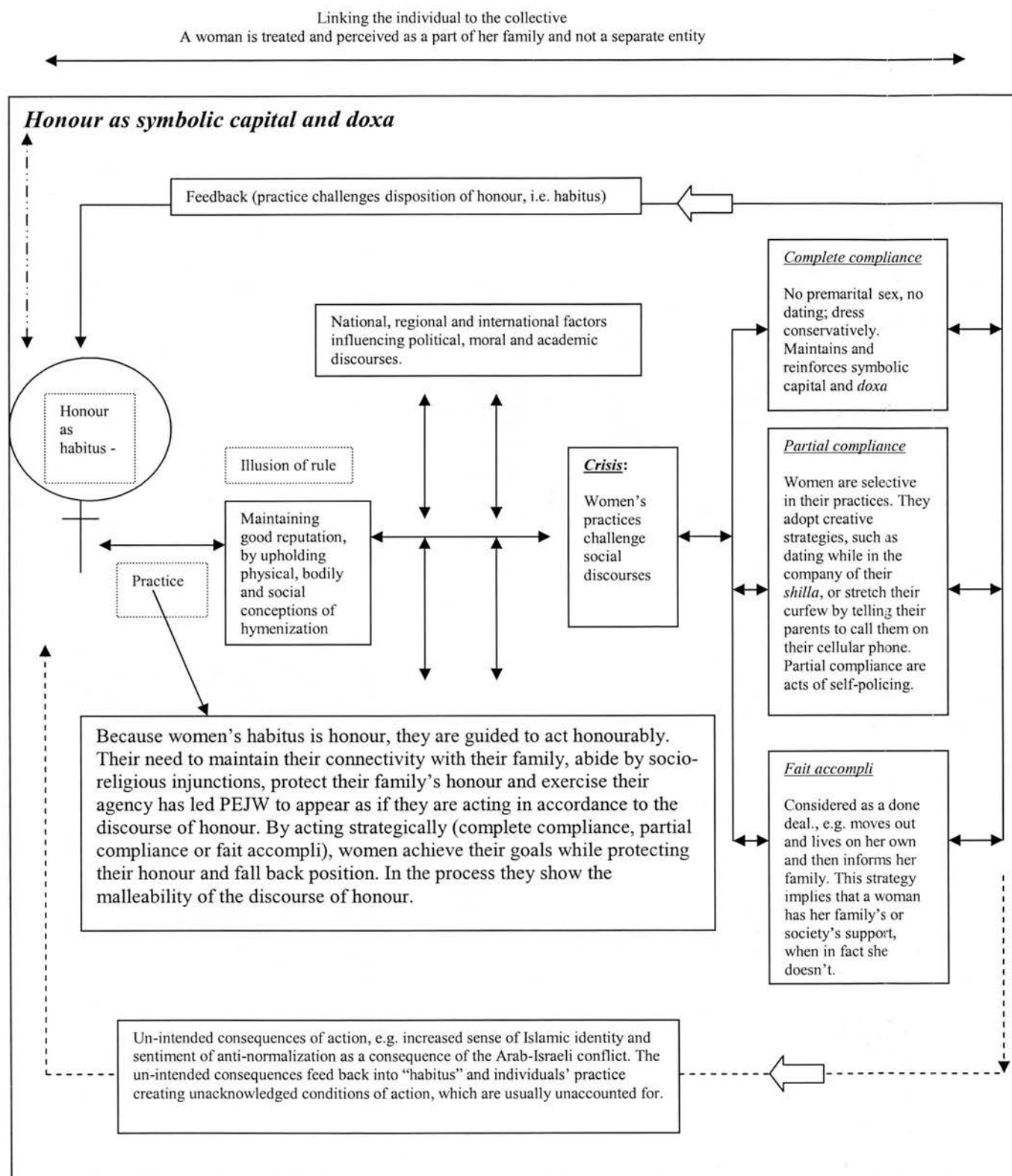
Thank you for your time.

Appendix E  
Figure 4 – Single Women And Typology Of Father-Brother Relationship



## Appendix F

Figure 5- Schematic Representation Of Women's Strategic Actions<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Schematic representation is for explanatory purposes to understand how the concepts are linked. It is *not* intended to promote notions of fixed boundaries, entities and relationships.

Appendix G  
List Of Participant's Pseudonyms Names, Marital Status, Education, Age And Work Sector

<b>Pseudonym</b> First name	<b>Status</b> (single/married )	<b>Education</b> (Local/Western)	<b>Age</b>	<b>Religion</b> (Christian/Muslim)	<b>Work sector</b> (private/public/ NGO)
'Anud	Single	Western	Mid-20s	Muslim	Public
Amal	Married, 1 offspring	Western	Late-40s	Christian	Private
Amira	Single	Local	Mid-20s	Muslim /hijab	Private
Aya	Married, 4 offspring	Local	Mid-50s	Muslim	Private
Dana	Single	Local	Early-30s	Christian	NGO
Diana	Married, 0 offspring	Western	Late-20s	Christian	Private
Diyala	Single	Western	Early-30s	Muslim	NGO
Faizeh	Single	Western	Late-20s	Muslim	Private
Farah	Married, 0 offspring	Local	Early-30s	Muslim /hijab	Private
Fatima	Married, 2 offspring	Local	Mid-50s	Muslim	Public
Fida	Married, 2 offspring	Western	Mid-30s	Christian	Private
Hala	Single	Local	Late-20s	Muslim	Private
Hana	Single	Western	Mid-20s	Christian	Private
Hiba	Married, 3 offspring	Local	Early-50s	Muslim	Private
Hind	Married, 2 offspring	Local	Mid-30s	Muslim	Private
Jude	Single	Western	Late-20s	Muslim	Public
Kafa	Married, 3 offspring	Western	Early-50s	Muslim /hijab	Public
Lama	Married, 2 offspring	Local	Mid-30s	Christian	Private
Luma	Married, 2 offspring	Western	Late-30s	Christian	Private
Manal	Married, 2 offspring	Local	Mid-30s	Muslim	Private
Maraya	Single	Western	Mid-30s	Muslim	Private
Marian	Single	Local	Late-20s	Christian	Private



<b>Pseudonym</b> First name	<b>Status</b> (single/married )	<b>Education</b> (Local/Western)	<b>Age</b>	<b>Religion</b> (Christian/Muslim)	<b>Work sector</b> (private/public/NGO)
Mary	Married, 3 offspring	Local	Early-40s	Christian	Private
May	Married, 3 offspring	Western	Early-40s	Muslim	NGO
Maya	Married, 2 offspring	Western	Early-40s	Christian	Private
Maysoon	Married, 3 offspring	Western	Early-40s	Muslim	Private
Mayyada	Married, 3 offspring	Local	Mid-50s	Muslim	Private
Muna	Single	Local	Late-20s	Christian	Private & public
Nadia	Married, 4 offspring	Local	Early-40s	Muslim	Public
Nadwa	Single	Western	Early-30s	Muslim	Private
Nahla	Single	Local	Late-20s	Muslim	Private
Najwa	Single	Western	Mid-30s	Christian	Private
Nawal	Single	Local	Mid-30s	Muslim /hijab	Private
Noura	Married, 1 offspring	Western	Early-30s	Muslim	Private
Rana	Married, 4 offspring	Local	Mid-50s	Muslim	Private
Randa	Married, 3 offspring	Local	Late-50s	Muslim	Private
Raya	Single	Local	Mid-30s	Muslim	Public
Reem	Single	Local	Mid-20s	Muslim /hijab	NGO
Rula	Single	Western	Early-30s	Muslim	Private
Sabah	Married, 2 offspring	Local	Mid-30s	Muslim	Private
Sahar	Married, 0 offspring	Western	Early-30s	Christian	Private
Salam	Single	Local	Mid-20s	Muslim /hijab	Private
Salwa	Married – 2 offspring	Western	Early-40s	Christian	Private
Samar	Married, 3 offspring	Local	Late-30s	Muslim	Private
Sana'	Married, 3 offspring	Local	Early-40s	Muslim	Private
Siham	Single	Western	Late-30s	Muslim	NGO
Su'ad	Single	Western	Early-30s	Muslim	Private
Suha	Single	Western	Early-40s	Christian	Private
Suhair	Married, 3 offspring	Western	Early-50s	Muslim /hijab	NGO

<b>Pseudonym</b> First name	<b>Status</b> (single/married)	<b>Education</b> (Local/Western)	<b>Age</b>	<b>Religion</b> (Christian/Muslim)	<b>Work sector</b> (private/public/NGO)
Suzie	Married, 3 offspring	Western	Mid-40s	Muslim	Public
Tala	Single	Local	Late-30s	Muslim	Private
Widad	Married, 4 offspring	Local	Mid-40s	Muslim	Public
Wisam	Married, 2 offspring	Western	Mid-40s	Muslim	Private
Yara	Married, 1 offspring	Western	Mid-40s	Christian	NGO